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OUR HOME IN HEAVEN

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Our Home in Heaven

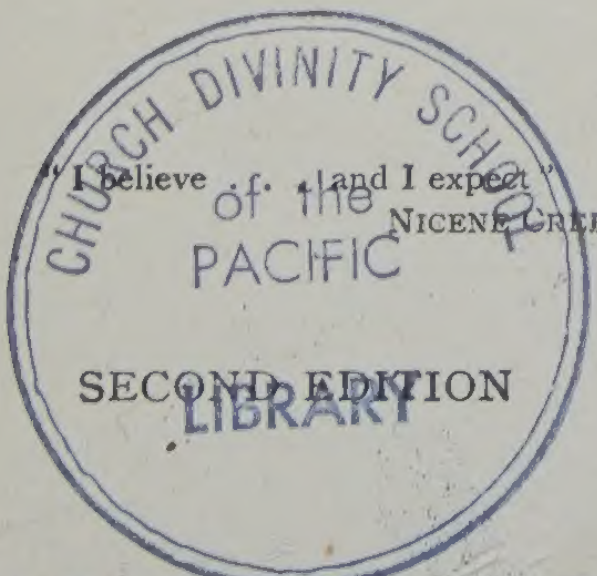
From the French

of the

Abbé Max Caron

Superior of the Little Seminary at Versailles

Translated by Edith Staniforth



"I believe . . . and I expect"

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TO

THOSE WHO SUFFER AND WEEP;

IN ORDER THAT

THEIR SUFFERINGS AND THEIR TEARS

MAY NOT BE WITHOUT HOPE

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INTRODUCTION

DURING the last few years a great number of books have appeared which, under different titles, all treat of the same subject—the life beyond the grave. These books have found, and will always find, an immense number of readers.

What a disturbing problem, indeed, they raise! It is not sufficient to say that it is the most important problem in life; we must go farther, and assert that for each one of us it is the only one! For rich or poor, young or old, learned or ignorant, we are to-day only *a minute in time, an atom in space,* and what shall we be to-morrow? Where shall we be cast by this mysterious tide which bears us away towards an unknown future? When it retreats after shattering our fragile bark on the dark reef, will it leave us to nothingness, or to eternal life?

Faced with this problem, what becomes of all our vain preoccupations with regard to fame or fortune, knowledge or happiness? Shadows! Trifles! *Everything here below,* says the inspired writer, *has its limit, and*

passes away. What is the longest human life compared to the eternity which preceded it, and the eternity which will follow it? A flash of light between two eternal nights!

Which of us has no departed friends to mourn for?

What is the fate of the dear ones who have disappeared from our midst, swallowed up by the impenetrable mystery? We bend over the cold stones which hide from our view all that death has left of them; we strive to pierce the veil; we ask ourselves: "Do they still live? Do they think of us? Can they see us?"

What would we not give to know something of that world in which they dwell? Our fortune would be but little, our life itself not too much.

With what avidity, therefore, we seize on these books which describe for us the *day after death!*

But what can they tell us after all? Do their authors know any more than we know ourselves? Far from it. Unless they have faith in Jesus Christ—we have no hesitation in asserting it—they know far less about God, about the enigma of this world, of life and of death, than the child who learns his Catechism. Consequently, whatever their grasp of intellect, the power of their pen, the magic of their imagery, their books are no more than *romances* which fail to satisfy. The

human soul is made in them to pass through adventures which, though attractive to certain diseased imaginations, are not of a nature to appeal to a well-balanced mind !

There are times when, reading these books, we are conscious of a certain charm which they possess, but the volume ended, the sadness returns. We even regret having read them, for instead of producing light, they deepen the shadow; instead of bringing us hope, they give birth to doubt, if not despair !

Often, while perusing these books in order to form an idea of what they were worth, we have been moved to pity and indignation. Certain pages more than once brought tears to our eyes. Our Christian dogmas were so calumniated in them ! The Gospel so belittled ! Jesus Christ Himself treated with such ignorance and arrogance !

It was this which in great measure induced us to take up our pen. We cannot lay claim to the learning or talent of the writers to whom we have just alluded. But we take our stand on *Truth*. For years, without disdaining the data of profane science, we have gleaned from the immense fields of Holy Scripture, Christian Theology, and Spiritual Philosophy all the most beautiful sayings, the deepest thoughts and the most sublime teachings they contain on Immortality. These are the notes which we have just grouped

under various headings, and the result is the modest work which we now offer to those who are tormented with a noble anxiety concerning their eternal destiny.

Book I. shows us the uneasiness of modern thought, gripped more than in any previous century, perhaps, by the need of belief in immortality, which it asks for in vain of men and creatures. The religion of the Gospel alone holds the sublime secret; it alone can give us absolute certainty.

In Book II. we follow the human soul at the moment when crossing the threshold of this world it beholds—God! The dazzling mystery envelopes it; to attract and fill it with rapture if it is pure; to blind it and blast it if it is guilty. We leave the latter to the miserable fate which drags it down to the eternal abyss, and we fix our gaze on the soul which, mounting from light to light, rises up to Heaven to behold God without a veil, to love Him beyond measure and to possess Him for ever!

Book III. brings us quite naturally to the question: *Where is the place of immortality?* A celebrated impious writer said, speaking of the Christians: "They do not know where to place their heaven, which is a proof that it does not exist." A fair-minded reader

will judge by the quotations which we subjoin from Holy Scripture, backed up by the commentaries of the Doctors and Fathers of the Church, whether the Christian religion has ever met with any difficulty in finding in the Universe an abode worthy of the Elect. Modern astronomy bade fair, in the opinion of many, to confound our faith with its marvellous discoveries, but, on the contrary, they inspire us with delight and enthusiasm. We assert nothing, it is true, but we show that these discoveries are so many splendid commentaries on the truths of our holy religion. Beholding the infinite horizons which this science opens out to us, the Christian soul, to use the words of a brilliant writer, *feels the shiver of the Divine*.

In Book IV. we attempt a sketch of *human life after the Resurrection*. Here our task is easy, for Catholic theology abounds in sublime assurances of the qualities which appertain to *glorious bodies*.

It seems as though we must now have exhausted our subject, yet no; one more question remains to be answered, the one, perhaps, which concerns us the most of all. It is not enough, indeed, to know that Heaven exists; what is most important to us is to know whether we have any real ground for hope that we shall enter one day into this abode of eternal happiness.

Book V., therefore, treats of *the number of the Elect.* We have always felt such a conviction of the *infinite* mercy of Jesus Christ—a conviction which years and study have only tended to strengthen—that pages have flowed from our pen, or rather from our soul, the soul of a priest, which may appear novel and presumptuous to more than one reader. But when they see from what source we derive our confidence, we feel persuaded that astonishment will cease, and give place to the most consoling hopes.

Moreover, this book has been written solely for those who suffer; it would scarcely be understood by the fortunate ones of the earth.

You who open it, if life up to this moment has only had joy in store for you, close it. But one day when sorrow meets you, *that king here below who sooner or later extends his sceptre over every man who passes through this world,* remember the humble volume which you placed long ago on a shelf in your book-case. Open it then, and, reading it, you will understand why you suffer; and if you do not go so far as to love your suffering, you will at least bow down without rebellion beneath the inscrutable Hand which only takes away the perishable goods of this world in order to force you to seek those which are eternal.

But you, on the contrary, who have already been marked out by misfortune; you who have had to suffer, in the body by sickness, in mind by the cruel uncertainties of doubt, in heart by disappointment, calumny, cruel desertion, in soul by temptation and the biting sharpness of committed sin, in your whole being by the loss of those beloved ones in whom your life's happiness centred, and of whom death has robbed you for ever; you, too, on whom the world begins to pall, who are sated with earthly loves, wounded by fortune or crushed by human injustice, accept and read these humble pages. Their eloquence, if they possess any, springs from sympathy with your sufferings and love for your souls; their strength from the fact that they contain some of those truths which the God of the Gospel came to bring upon earth. For it is He, after all, whom we quote in what we are telling you.

If, however, in touching on these solemn questions, we should have deviated in any way from the doctrine of the Catholic Church, we declare beforehand that we retract and disavow with the whole energy of our faith anything that may be pronounced erroneous or dangerous.

Humbly prostrate before the throne of God, with a deep sense of our weakness, we beseech Him to bless these pages, so that

they may go through the world where there are so many souls that mourn and so many wounded hearts, bringing hope to some, courage to others, and Truth to all.

Little Seminary of Versailles.

BOOK I

THE ONLY PROBLEM

CHAPTER I.—THE SETTING FORTH OF THE SUBJECT

" II.—THE DISAPPOINTMENTS OF LIFE.

" III.—THE IMPOTENCE OF REASON.

" IV.—THE SOLUTION.

OUR HOME IN HEAVEN

CHAPTER I

THE SETTING FORTH OF THE SUBJECT

"To be or not to be, that is the question."—SHAKESPEARE.

I.

"THE immortality of the soul is a matter which concerns us so strongly and touches us so deeply that a man must be devoid of natural feeling who is too indifferent to seek to know the truth about it. All our actions and thoughts must travel by such different roads according as there are eternal gifts to hope for, or not! . . .

"I have only compassion for those who groan sincerely under this doubt, who look upon it as their greatest misfortune, and who make it their chief and gravest occupation in life to try and resolve it. But I view those very differently who spend their whole existence without thinking of their last end. Such negligence, in a matter which concerns themselves, their eternity, and their all,

irritates me more than it moves me; it fills me with astonishment and terror!"*

What a problem, indeed, is that of our destiny beyond the grave! For every man capable of a personal idea, of pausing to consider it, of discussing its value, of drawing conclusions from it, it is *the* great problem: it is not enough to say this, we must add: it is the *only problem*. Was not this, after all, the teaching of the God of the Gospel? "Thou art careful and troubled about many things, one alone is necessary."

But let us on this subject give place to the great masters of human thought; their words will come home to the reader with an authority which must be lacking in ours.

"This problem is there, before us, at the entrance of all the avenues of the soul, like an inexorable sphinx demanding its prey. The questions which it raises follow us everywhere; they haunt us at night, they steal into our occupations and our pleasures, they lie in ambush at all the turnings of our ways, they rise up from the depths of our being, and chill our soul with their abrupt interpellation: Who am I? From whence do I come? Whither am I going? On what shore will the wave of my existence break? Where will it leave me when it retires? . . .

* Pascal, *Pensées.*

What destiny shall I encounter there? What I foresee is that, whatever it may be, this destiny will be final, absolute, eternal!"*

I may endeavour in vain to dismiss this problem from my mind. Every effort in this direction only renders it more formidable. For I have not the power to retard its solution by a single hour; and if I have despised it, at any moment this solution may be given against me!

"It does not require any great elevation of soul to understand that we have here no true or solid satisfaction; that all our pleasures are only vanity, and our evils are infinite, and that death, which threatens us every instant, will place us in a few years, perhaps even in a few hours, in a state of eternal happiness or misery, or will annihilate us altogether! Between us and Heaven, Hell or Annihilation, there exists therefore only life, which is the most fragile thing in this world. . . ."†

Therefore the truly wise man, the only wise man, is he who has found, or who seeks to find, the true answer to this formidable question.

In the last century a great soldier, who was afterwards to become a great Christian—

* Auguste Nicolas, *L'Art de Croire*, chap. iv.
† Pascal, *Pensées*.

General de Lamoricière—received a visit one day from a friend in the land of exile to which a political reverse of fortune had forced him to retire. It was at the time of the war in Italy. His friend found him anxiously following the march of the French Army on a map spread out in front of him. The four corners of the map were held down by the books in daily use with the General. These were a catechism, an *Imitation*, a missal, and a volume on philosophy by the Père Gratry. The visitor expressed his surprise at finding such books on the General's table, and Lamoricière replied: "Yes, I have come to that, I am busy with that. I do not wish, like you, to remain in a state of insecurity, between Heaven and earth, between day and night. I want to know where I am going."

Is not that the supreme wisdom, to seek to find out where we are going, what is our eternal goal?

On the other hand, is it not an offence against reason, a crime against our own soul, to despise this, the *only problem?*

In order that we may finally convince ourselves on this point, let us consider what the pagan writers have written and done about it. Yet they had not, like us, the Divine light of the Gospel.

"If access to these mysteries were denied to me," writes Seneca, "it would not have

been worth while to be born. For why should I rejoice to be among the number of the living? . . . In order to take care of this feeble and debilitated body, which perishes directly we cease to feed it? To be a sick-nurse to it all my life? You deny me Heaven? But that condemns me to live with my head bowed down to the earth. No, I am too great and have too lofty a mission to resign myself to be the slave of my body."*

But of all the ancient writers the one who applied himself most passionately to the study of what we call *the beyond* of life is Plato.

"The human soul," he says, "desires passionately to penetrate this mystery."†

With what enthusiasm he speaks of this eternal world! According to him, all that we see below is only the shadow; the reality lies beyond. As long as life detains us on earth, we are like prisoners chained in the depths of a dark cavern with their backs turned to the only opening through which a little light penetrates to them. The objects outside project their shapes on the walls of the cavern. But what are these shapes, these shadows, which they admire at times, and even love, compared to the living realities without? "To die," he said, "is

* *Questions Naturelles*, book i.
† *Letter II. to Dionysius.*

to burst our bonds, to break out of our prison, to leap up to the world of eternal realities."

"To see God," cried this pagan, with a transport which puts us to shame and confounds us, we who are the sons of the Gospel —"to see God, what is necessary? To be pure and to die!"

Thus spoke Plato to those young Athenians who, forsaking the frivolities of the great city, came to listen to the teachings of the famous philosopher in his solitude at Cape Sunium. And more than once, it is said, these enthusiastic listeners, not knowing that suicide is a crime, threw themselves from the summit of the cliff into the sea. They wished to go without delay and behold this eternal world and its splendours of which they had obtained a glimpse from their master's words!

II.

But is it true that man can *rest in ignorance* of his destiny beyond the grave? Some men may, perhaps, but it is to be feared that for them this is a punishment. We read in the Sacred Books this terrifying sentence: *The wicked man, when he is come into the depths of sin, contemneth.**

With most men, and especially those most cultivated in mind and noblest in heart, the thought of eternity goes hand in hand with

* Prov. xviii. 3.

the idea of God, to which, indeed, it is closely allied, and of it may also be said: "It has neither beginning nor end. Driven away in the East, it returns in the West."*

During the last two centuries successive generations have made gigantic efforts to drive away the idea of God, and suppress all thought of eternity. In the eighteenth century Philosophy waged war against the Supernatural; in the last century Science endeavoured to insure a decisive triumph of matter over mind.

Behold what happens! Certain writers, themselves unbelievers, but appalled by the degradation and suffering to which all these atheistical and materialistic theories lead, predict in these words the return of the great ideas which have been proscribed:

"The generation to come, those who are playing prisoners' base at the time I write, will rush into Spiritualism with an impetuosity which has never, perhaps, been seen before."†

The following lines indicate the reason of this rush to Spiritualism:

"Here are men who differ widely, who come from every point of the horizon; a Russian, a Norwegian, a Hungarian Jew, a Genevese, a Frenchman. They have nothing in common between them except

* Père Lacordaire.
† Alexandre Dumas the younger.

one link which unites them as the same chain riveted all the convicts on board a Barbary corsair's galley, recruited on every shore. It is the characteristic note of their thoughts; they are seeking the soul they have lost! They bear witness to an indescribable uneasiness, and not merely a personal uneasiness, but they agree in establishing the fact of the same uneasiness around them in the search for the soul which has been lost."*

Yes, our generation has lost its soul, ever since it was made to believe that life was only *a dream between two abysses of nothingness!* But that was a false and sickly state. Consequently the sick soul awakens, frequently and in despite of itself, and in its lucid moments is heard to cry out:

"Against my will the Infinite torments me!"

Then, in order to calm it, high-sounding words are made to resound in its ears, the catchwords of the *Ideal to be pursued*, of *Spiritualism to be asserted*. But when the soul asks what is this Ideal, on what foundation this Spiritualism rests, those who have pronounced these words remain silent. What answer, indeed, can they make? Alas! by undermining belief in God they have rendered authority void, and made any higher order of speech impossible!

* M. de Vogüé.

III.

There is another cause for the return of Spiritualism in our social life—an imperious and terrible one.

The upper classes, in losing God, have lost their soul; they are enervated by comfort, and allow power to escape from their effeminate hands. But the lower classes arise and make their entry on the world's stage. They are young, ardent, eager to play a part, tormented above all by hunger and thirst for enjoyment. Why was not the Gospel left to them? They would understand then that happiness is not of this world, that power and riches are deceitful gifts, and that all the treasures of the earth cannot satisfy a heart which thirsts for the infinite; in a word, they would believe, like those who came before them, that this much-dreamt-of happiness is to be found, not on this, but on the farther side of the grave. They could then wait patiently for the eternal compensation which Christ promised in the deserts of Palestine in these words: "Blessed are the poor . . . for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven! Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted! Blessed are they that suffer . . . for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven!"*

* St. Matt. v.

But again and again, to the people which suffers, to the workmen who eat their bread after earning it by their sweat, sometimes by their blood, the falsehood is repeated: "Life is but a dream between two never-ending slumbers. Therefore look for no other happiness than that which is derived here below, from the pleasures and riches of this life." Why, then, should they not insist on their share? And if it is denied to them, what should prevent them from taking it? Do they not exceed in number and strength? The slaves of antiquity also had the advantage of numbers, but they lacked the strength. The chains with which they were laden deprived them of movement, liberty, and life. The religion taught by Christ broke all these bonds. Under its maternal and mighty guidance the slaves became serfs, and the serfs citizens. Behold them now! *The sovereign people.* At their pleasure they make and unmake kings, empires, republics, while yet they view with untamed envy the fortunate ones of the earth, whose luxury seems like an insult to their rags, and whose well-being is a challenge to their own misery.

"The barbarians who threaten us," wrote a brilliant writer not long ago on this subject, "no longer come from the steppes of the East or the forests of the North; they are established in our midst, they speak our

tongue, they are of our own race and our own blood, and they have fallen back into barbarism through the loss of their faith in God and their hope of Heaven. It is not their ignorance which renders these barbarians of civilization so much to be feared, but their passions, the rancour, the ambition, the hatred which there is nothing now to restrain, and which have taken the place of their vanished beliefs in these empty souls. These are the masses which we must win over to the Gospel, for there is no safety for us unless we save them. And the teaching that we must bring them is not the teaching of science, for science in the hands of the evilly disposed is an engine of destruction instead of a life-giving implement. We no longer ignore what the people need, and in this at least we are superior to our fathers; it is the teaching of morality, the teaching of faith and love, the only teaching which gives life."*

Who is to bring this teaching of faith and love to the crowds which go by, their eyes bent on the ground, their thoughts never soaring above the matter from which they hope to snatch some few of these coarse joys which they call happiness ?

The same writer will tell us.

" The great stroke of holy folly which is to transform the world, if it ever comes, will be initiated by one of those beings who have

* M. de Vogüé.

made the great sacrifice, who are the natural ministers of sublime foolishness, who have a right to command men's hearts because they have bruised their own, whom their habit sets apart, and not only their habit, but above all, you know well, the unfathomable mystery which marks their brow, the mystery of the triple vow: obedience, poverty, chastity."

These last words bring back to my mind a simple anecdote which contains more truth than many of the books which for over half a century have been written on the subject we are considering.

I was quite a young man, invested only a few months before with the priestly cassock. I came by chance one day to a yard where a number of workmen were at work. One of them who appeared to be at their head turned his eyes in my direction without interrupting his work. "Ah! young man," he said to me, smiling, "you are learning to be a priest? You are right. The workman and the priest will find each other again one day. For see," he continued in a tone of conviction that was truly astonishing, "you priests possess the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and until the Gospel is given back to us we workmen will be makers of revolution!"

The long years which have elapsed since I heard this speech have only invested it with a deeper and more actual meaning.

Yes, indeed, if the Gospel is not given back to the people, and through the Gospel faith in a God who is just and good, and belief in a Heaven where all the injustice committed on earth will be repaired, woe to the rich! but also woe to the poor! One of these days our society will resemble an immense horde of savages, who, armed, some with gilt weapons and others with rusty ones, will rush upon each other to snatch from one another a few miserable rags of stuff, or dispute a wretched pasturage on the edge of a precipice, over which one after the other all end by rolling to the bottom, and for ever!

What do I say? It will be more horrible still. For our European workmen, *these slaves of their daily bread*, as they call themselves, hold weapons in their hands beside which the hatchet of the slave of old days and the assegai of the modern savage are child's play, in those terrible forces of nature of which Science has supplied them with the secret. In a few hours they are able to destroy whole cities, to waste with fire and drench with blood the soil of an entire country!

Have we forgotten what was done in France less than half a century ago?

An illustrious traveller* was exploring at the time at the peril of his life the unknown regions of the African continent. When in the newspapers he received from Europe he

* Stanley, *In Search of Livingstone.*

read a year afterwards the account of the horrors into which the most beautiful city in Europe had been plunged, he could not help exclaiming: "O France! O Frenchmen! such things are unknown even in Central Africa!"

Since then irreligion, officially taught to the people, has increased tenfold the number of the enemies of society, and the discoveries of scientists have still further increased their power. O France! O Frenchmen! return to the Christian Ideal; give back the Gospel to those who work and suffer, or unheard-of catastrophes will descend upon you. The flames of your conflagrations will rise higher than your native hills, and blood will flow in torrents in your civil wars! Then will the nations of the earth behold what is the fate of a great people which dares to slight Christ's law and to persecute those who believe in His teaching!

And you who read these lines, although age may already have whitened your hair, we dare not affirm that death will come to you before you have witnessed, perhaps even been the victims of, these catastrophes.

CHAPTER II

THE DISAPPOINTMENTS OF LIFE

"You seek the happiness of life where life does not exist."—ST. AUGUSTINE.

I.

THERE is something infinite in the aspirations of every human soul. Now, "the whole object of man is to be happy."* To know in order to love, and to love in order to be happy, is a law from which no one is exempt. From it arise those vague, deep disturbances of the soul which lay hold of a young man as soon as he begins to disengage himself from the puerile preoccupations of early youth. The slope of life which he is beginning to climb is so beautiful! Beside him are those he loves, his kinsfolk and his friends; and before him rise those mountain-peaks which the divine sunshine of hope gilds with dazzling splendour. In vain those who have already climbed those heights endeavour to warn him against the mirage with which imagination cheats him. Driven by the hunger and thirst of his soul, he cannot believe that God would thus have put into him wants which he cannot satisfy. He springs forward, therefore: "Happiness, and still more happiness!" he seems to

* Bossuet.

exclaim; and, full of vigour and enthusiasm, he ascends towards those summits that God has appointed as our sojourn in the fulness of life. "Whither are you going?" cries St. Augustine—for he also passed by these ways and attained those summits, with an enthusiasm that few human hearts are capable of—"you will not find rest there. How can the happiness of life be found where life itself does not exist?"*

"What renders youth so beautiful," says a charming writer, who must have looked into the depths of his own heart when he wrote that page, "is the double illusion which gilds and throws back the horizon of life. These noble instincts which stir in your hearts with such lofty ambitions, these potent desires which agitate and beckon you on—is it possible not to believe that God placed them there in order to content them, and that this promise will be kept by life? It *is* a promise . . . the promise of a great and happy destiny . . . but if you count on its fulfilment in this world you are mistaken. This world is finite, and the desires of your nature are infinite. If each one seized for himself all the good things which it contains, these good things, thrown into the abyss, would not fill it. We lay the blame on all sides that we are not happy, on God and man, on society and those who govern it. Do

* *Confessions*, book iv., chap. xii.

not let your voice swell this wild accusation, young man, nor your soul give way to this miserable discouragement; learn in good time to see life as it really is, and not to ask of it what it does not contain. *It is neither Providence nor life which deceives us; it is we who deceive ourselves with regard to the designs of the one and the object of the other.*"*

No, it is not God who deceives us by putting into our hearts this hunger and thirst for the Infinite; it is we who deceive ourselves, when, in order to fill the void in our hearts, we demand from the creatures of a day an imperishable affection, and from finite beings a happiness without limit!

In vain our imagination invests these idols with Divine reflections; the illusion cannot last long. Soon the idols appear in their true light, sorry, ephemeral, miserable creatures, as miserable as ourselves, and sometimes more so! When that day comes we find ourselves blushing for what only yesterday we adored!

Happy, thrice happy, then, the man who, disabused of his error, purified and enlightened, realizes that nothing and no one in this world is worthy of the gift of himself; and who, before reaching middle age, understands that we must seek this happiness beyond the earth: *Excelsius! Above the peaks!*

It is in this hour of holy enthusiasm and

* Jouffroy.

generous self-sacrifice that the young girl tears herself away from her bridal preparations, the young man turns his back on the most brilliant career, to bestow themselves on the cloister or embrace the priesthood, and offer the flower of their youth to God.

It is the hour also when those who are called upon to live in the world turn away from the futility and trifles, the emptiness of a purely worldly life, in order to begin a new existence regulated by work, duty, and honour.

II.

To know, to love, to act—that is human destiny. But, alas! man wanders away only too often from this noble purpose.

The desires of the brute devoid of reason do not go beyond the satisfaction of its instincts; it is therefore certain to find rest and happiness below. It is not so with man. It is true that he must provide for the necessities of the body, but it is not the body which hungers for happiness—it is the soul.

As we have just seen, the young man believes that this world contains more joys than are required to fill up the void in his heart. The heart is so small! Yet, strange to say, the more it is given the more it expands. Before long it resembles a chasm which nothing can fill. This has been put

into words by a worldly writer of our own time in verses which are often quoted:

"When my heart, wearied by the obsession of a dream, returns to reality to seek relief, I find in the dregs of the vain pleasures I summon to my aid such disgust that I am like to die of it."

Then man—the better kind of man—understands that he has been mistaken. Poor and wretched creatures have failed to give him the happiness he sought from them; he will now seek it in the pursuit of riches, power, if possible, glory.

"Deluded once more by these vain hopes, man labours to surpass his fellows in power, in fame, in science, in riches; and there is no little advantage, not even a bodily one, too petty for his vanity to find delight in. . . .

"Whole nations, the great and learned as well as the ignorant amongst men, all wear themselves out in the endeavour to win admiration, to exalt themselves in the opinion of others and in their own imagination. Most of the occupations of man have no other object. It is with the sole object of raising himself in his own estimation that one man lays waste the earth, and another spends his life studying its productions; that one shuts himself up in his study to write a book, and another risks being killed thousands of miles away from home for the sake

of a bit of ribbon, which by exalting him in his own eyes may distract him, he thinks, from that importunate remembrance of his misery and nothingness. Our opinions, our most frivolous amusements even, have as a rule no other motive power. Our pride is so overweening, and at the same time so beggarly, that there is nothing which will not feed it: the hazard of cards, the chance of a lucky throw; even—terrible to picture!—separation from God and the loss of all hope."*

But can all this give happiness? As long as he has not actually succeeded in attaining to the possession of riches, the exercise of power, the intoxication of glory, man still keeps at least the hope of being happy one day. But this illusion is no longer possible to him—a rare case, indeed—who has seen the fulfilment of all the desires which the human heart can conceive.

A Roman,† who rose from the lowest ranks of the army to the throne of the Cæsars—that is to say, to the domination of the world—summed up in these words the result of thirty years of satisfied ambition: "I have been everything, and I have seen that everything is nothing."

Nearer our own times, a monarch,‡ no less powerful and even more famous, who also

* La Mennais, *Essai sur L'Indifférence*, chap. ix.
† Marcus Aurelius. ‡ Napoleon.

rose to the imperial purple from the rank of a private soldier, realized too the emptiness of human greatness, the nothingness of power and glory. And we are told that on the evening of one of his greatest triumphs he was heard to say to himself, in a tone of hopeless sadness: "What! To reign—is it no more than that!"

Which of us will dare to expect happiness after such examples?

III.

Thus man passes over the zenith of life. But soon he must descend the opposite slope. Alas! how different it is to the one he climbed in his youth! The first had the freshness of morning, the scent of spring; its summit was radiant as the dawn! The one which he must now descend is dark—dark as night, desolate as winter!

The dreams of youth have long since faded away; he has learnt the falsehood and impotence of the ambitions of later life; and, to use Bossuet's expression, his heart only holds *the inexorable weariness which lies at the bottom of human life!* His soul only holds one memory: the memory of those he has loved! One by one he has left them all behind him, those in whom he found the only true happiness of his life. Down there, beneath the cold stone, they sleep the great sleep; his tears, his sobs, could not preserve

them from it; they cannot now awaken them. For all who live to be old are reduced one day or other to the despairing cry: "All thou couldst have of mine, stern Death! thou hast."*

At this point of his existence man often sinks into egotism; he now expects only from himself what he formerly sought in vain from others, and surrounds himself with the poor satisfactions of creature comfort. As money promotes this comfort, he continues, even on the brink of the grave, piling up riches which it would require several lives to exhaust.

But if health, that last falsehood of life, abandons him, giving place to infirmity, sickness, and suffering, all is lost in his eyes, and lost without hope of recovery! Unfortunate man! he then comprehends, but too late, the terrible truth of these words: *The punishment for having lived without religion is one day to suffer without hope!*

Unless now he turns to God, unless religious belief brings back to his heart the understanding of suffering, the acceptance of expiation, and the hope of Heaven, he is perilously near, in order to end a life which has lasted too long already, the committal of a crime—an irreparable one, since it has no morrow—the crime of suicide!

"O mortal life! how many hast thou deceived, seduced, and blinded! . . . Those

* Byron, *Childe Harold*, ii. 96.

who love thee do not know thee, and those only know thee who despise thee !"*

We have just heard the words of a saint; let us now listen to the man of the world:

"If all the woods of the earth were to bloom with myrtles and roses, if all its valleys were valleys of Campania, its islands the Fortunate Isles, its gardens Elysium; if all eyes were bright with joyous serenity—yes, even then, we should cherish the hope of immortality. But, alas ! when so many dwellings are houses of mourning, so many fields battlefields, when so many faces are disfigured by pallor, and each day we encounter poor faded eyes, reddened, marked, and dulled with sorrow, oh, my God ! can we believe that the grave will engulf everything ?"†

CHAPTER III

THE IMPOTENCE OF REASON

"Oh, my friend ! how unhappy we are in being only poor philosophers ! . . . To argue is to doubt, and to doubt is to suffer !"—Santa Rosa.

I.

It is easy for the working classes, with their heads bent down to the earth with fatigue,

* St. Columba.

† John Paul Richter, *The Valley of Campania.*

their thoughts entangled in matter with the hard necessities of life, to lose and destroy the higher aspirations of the soul. To work, to eat, to rest a little, to begin again the following day, and so on till the day when they descend to the tomb, without regret and without hope—that is their whole future if they live without religion!

But for the man who by his birth, surroundings, and studies, rises above the world of sense and matter to dwell in the realm of thought, the case is widely different.

Such a man—and it is to his honour—cannot escape from the *tormenting idea of the Infinite*. He succeeds in stifling it at times, and he would willingly persuade himself that he is happy. But there are moments when the vortex of life ceases and there comes a calm, when from the bottom of his heart, as though from the depths of an unfathomable abyss, a voice arises, repeating in a thousand different keys:

"An immense hope has been made known to the earth,
In spite of myself, I must raise my eyes to Heaven."

Let us read, or rather let us meditate, on this page which was written by one of the most gifted men of the last century. The ill he describes is the one from which he suffered from the day he lost his faith; it was this ill, we are told, which destroyed his strength

and put an end to his life in the midst of a most brilliant career:

"Do not imagine that only the troubles of life have the power to turn our thoughts to the consideration of the problem of our future destiny; it springs from our joys as well as from our sorrows, because we are equally deluded by both.

"In the first moment of satisfaction of our desires we are presumptuous enough, or rather innocent enough, to think ourselves happy. But, if this happiness lasts, the charm we found in it at first soon fades, and where you imagined at first you had found complete satisfaction, you now feel a lesser satisfaction, succeeded by a lesser one still, which little by little wears itself out and becomes extinct, leaving in its place only boredom and disgust. This is the inevitable winding-up of all human happiness; this is the fatal law from which it cannot escape. . . .

"Is happiness, then, a shadow, life a disappointment, our desires a deceitful snare? Such a demonstration as this is unanswerable: it is more decisive even than that of sorrow; for in sorrow you may still delude yourself, and blaming your own evil fortune excuse the nature of things, whereas here it is the very nature of things which is convicted of malice. The heart of man is brought face to face with all the joys of life, and the heart of man is not satisfied. This

melancholy self-examination which raises a man of mature age to the consideration of his future state, which makes him uneasy and leads him to ask himself what it will be, is more often caused by the experience of the joys of life than of its sorrows."*

Then, for many minds, begins that search for what lies *beyond* this life, which, from the diversity of human nature, takes the strangest and most varied forms.

In our own days we see men, far more numerous than is generally supposed, who throw themselves with a sort of frenzy into the pursuit of those occult sciences, which under different names and by various methods all aim at the same object: to put *our world* in communication with the *other world*.

Unhappy mortals! they refused to believe in the Gospel, and they are reduced to believing in table-turning! They refused, in their pride, to listen to the priest teaching truth from the pulpit, and they are reduced to hearing magicians on a stage!

Mystery and punishment!

II.

We begin by asking ourselves whether it is from Science that we must seek enlightenment as to the origin and end of human destinies.

* Jouffroy, *Mélanges Philosophiques.*

Far be it from us to speak ill of Science! Have not our Sacred Books pronounced this great saying: *The Master of all Science is God?* Although the laws which constitute Science are as old as the world, they have only from the last century been subjected to a close and serious study, and already the application of its wonderful forces to the needs of man has changed the whole face of the earth and transformed our social life. Yet all these wonderful discoveries are only a part of our primitive inheritance. It was sin which made us lose our empire over Nature, and by labour we regain it little by little.

But man would be unreasonable if he asked of Science what it had not the power to bestow.

"The Future belongs to Science," was the cry on all sides half a century ago.

Listen to what the most authoritative teachers of the present day have to say about it:

"Science had promised us to do away with *Mystery*. Not only has it not done away with it, but we see now clearly that it will never elucidate it. Science is powerless, not only to resolve, but even to put before us properly the only questions which really matter to us, the questions which concern the origin of man, the laws for his guidance, his future destiny. The *unknown* surrounds

us, envelops us, presses us, and neither physical laws nor physiological results give us any means of discovering anything about it.

"I have here, before my eyes, books formerly famous, in which we eagerly sought the answer to our doubts; what have they proved, after all?

"Their discoveries have only resulted in strengthening our attachment to life, which seems, in truth, the height of foolishness in a creature condemned to die."*

It would be impossible to proclaim more eloquently the truth we seek to establish: the impotence of Reason, the failure of Science, when the question is that of the problem of our destiny beyond the grave!

III.

There are other minds which seek their Ideal in Art and Literature. There is no doubt that the human heart may find here a noble enjoyment. Under these varied forms *Beauty is the splendour of Truth*, as a pagan finely expressed it. We Christians can say with as much truth but more precision: *Beauty is the splendour of God*. "There is nothing beautiful but God, and after God the most beautiful thing is the

* Brunetière, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, January, 1895.

soul, and after the soul thought, and after thought speech. Therefore, the more a soul resembles God, the more thought resembles the soul, the more speech resembles thought, the more beautiful it all is."*

We see, therefore, that the creature is only the round of a ladder by which we climb up to God. "Will the human soul, free, immortal, filled with desires greater than itself, accept a human work as its Ideal? No, never! In its search for that perfection which is reflected in the inmost depths of its being it surmounts all the degrees of creation, and never pauses till it reaches the Uncreated. It requires no less than the Creator Himself to quench the thirst of our souls."†

The poet, the man of letters, the artist, magnifies his own work in vain; an empty and silent form, it fails to satisfy the human heart, which hungers for love and life. Michael Angelo's exclamation, when he struck with his chisel the Moses he had just completed, is well known: "But speak to me, then!"

But even if the marble had come to life, and found a soul with which to love the author of its being and a voice to tell him so, how would that have conduced to the great artist's happiness?

We have seen a man die in the prime of

* Joubert.

† *L'Enthousiasme*, by Madame Gzertz.

life, who was so marvellously gifted as an artist, that he could say of himself on his death-bed without too much presumption: "If I had known how to keep my faith, I might have rivalled Michael Angelo." He came to Paris in his eighteenth year, and there the influence of the world and the wish to find favour in the eyes of the impious masters of the time destroyed before long in his soul the faith of his youth, and thus broke the spring of his genius!

A talented painter,* who wished to make an apotheosis of his death, imagined a wonderful scene: in his last moments all the creations of the artist come to life, and pass in a glorious procession before his death-bed. The dying man sees them approach. He raises his head, already bowed down by death, his eye regains its fire. Ah! he recognizes them, his works! Each one is, so to speak, the daughter of his soul. It is at the cost of his days and nights, of his strength and his life, that he has given them being. They come to him now and smile at him as they pass. But what can their smile do for him? He suffers, he is about to die! . . .

Poor great artist! but on your death-bed, happily, you remembered your mother's pious teaching, and the religion of Christ came to bring you, not only pardon on earth,

* Maignan, *Derniers Moments de Carpeaux.*

but the secure hope of the true and only immortality!

All, alas! are not so happy as thus to seek the aid of the God of their childhood, and find in Him the gift of purifying repentance, of those fervent desires which open the gates of Heaven; but all recognize their misery.

Let us listen for an instant to one who has justly been called *the songster of despair:*

"Yet if, as holiest men have deem'd, there be
A land of souls beyond that sable shore,
How sweet it were in concert to adore
With those who made our mortal labours light!
To hear each voice we feared to hear no more!"*

The greatest poetic genius, perhaps, that France has ever known, and certainly the most sincere, said in his turn a few weeks before his death: "I have read, I have sought, I have looked: now I have something better to do. Tears and prayer are of the Divine essence. It is God who has given us the power to weep, and since tears come from Him they must return to Him."†

When he had breathed his last, this poem, which he had wetted with his tears, and which we may justly look upon as the last cry of his heart and the testament of his soul, was found under his pillow:

"I have lost my strength and my life, my friends and my gaiety; I have lost that faith

* Byron, *Childe Harold*, ii. 8. † De Musset.

in myself which made men believe in my genius.

"When I first knew Truth I thought I had found a friend, but when I felt and understood her she grew distasteful to me.

"And yet she is eternal, and they who pass her by have been ignorant of all below.

"God speaks, and we must reply: The one good which remains to me is that I have sometimes wept."

We may hope that these tears were not wasted, since they were shed so often over the pages of the Gospel.

The following lines will give pleasure to those who cannot withhold their pity and admiration from this great artist, led away, as he says himself, in an age into which he was born out of due time. A pious lady visited his room a short time after his death. She noticed a New Testament, very much worn, on his table. Alfred de Musset's faithful servant saw her looking at it. "O madam!" she exclaimed, "I do not know what my poor master found in that book. He had a passion for it. Towards the end he used to put it under his pillow in order to have it within his reach at night. How often I have found him reading it with tears!"

We are able to state from a trustworthy

source, in addition to this, that a priest visited the unfortunate poet on his death-bed on several occasions, and through the administration of the last Sacraments prepared his soul to appear before God.

It is true, indeed, that he had said in former days:

"O Christ! I am not of those who are led by prayer, with trembling steps, into Thy silent temples; I am not of those who kneel at Thy Calvary, and beat their breasts, and kiss Thy bleeding feet."

But sorrow had not then touched him. How different this life and this world appear when death draws near in the clear light of approaching eternity!

IV.

But if Science, Art, and Poetry can do so little for us in this world, and nothing beyond it, we may be more fortunate with Philosophy.

Let us consult first the writers of antiquity. As we have already seen, they said and wrote magnificent things with regard to the question we are now considering. But had they any real certainty as to this immortality about which, at certain moments, they discoursed so well?

Socrates died a martyr to his belief in an eternal, almighty God, whose justice would punish criminals eternally and reward the good eternally beyond this life; and History shows him to us reclining on the couch where he has just drunk from the fatal cup, expatiating on that other life of which he is about in an instant to cross the threshold. "Doubtless," he said to one of his favourite disciples, "you regard these speculations on immortality as the delirious dreams of an old woman, and you despise them. I should despise them myself if in our researches we had found anything more salutary and more certain. It would not be reasonable to assert that all is exactly as I have pictured it to you, but it is worth while to take the risk of believing that what I have told you about souls and their future dwelling-place is, if not precisely, at least approximately true. It is a hope with which to charm our uncertainty, and that has led me to prolong this discourse."*

What a poor and sorry conclusion! The only certainty we derive from the study of this page is that the immortality of the soul is most uncertain.

"We seek the truth," said Cicero, "with the utmost care and with most zealous efforts. . . . But the obscurity is so great,

* Socrates, quoted by Plato.

and our own judgment so feeble, that the most learned men of antiquity have despaired with reason of succeeding in their research."

Farther on, the great orator, who had written such splendid pages on immortality, lets this anguished cry escape from his heart, tormented with doubt: "O Lucullus! all these secrets are hidden from our eyes in thick darkness, and the greatest genius among men cannot penetrate it! . . ."*

To conclude this mournful journey through the field of heathen philosophy, let us pause to consider the epitaph which Tacitus carved with his own hand on the monument erected to Agricola:†

"If, as sages love to say,
Great souls do not perish
Altogether with their bodies,
Rest in peace!"

Doubt is cruel everywhere, in every hour of life; but when we kneel before the tomb which hides from our eyes a being most tenderly loved it becomes frightful and terrifying!

Shall we seek from Eastern Philosophy the answer we have failed to obtain from the sages of antiquity? Confucius, the most illustrious of all Asiatic philosophers, checks us at once: "How can you expect me," he

* *Académique.* † Tacitus, *Life of Agricola.*

answered those who asked what he thought of the Life Beyond, "to know the future when I have not yet attained to the knowledge of the present life?"

Without any longer delay, let us come to modern Philosophy. Alas! it is even worse. All these philosophers, so magnificent in their promises, fail miserably in their accomplishment. They only agree on one point: to destroy. As we read, anger sometimes gives place to pity, and after throwing their books into the flames, we would willingly rise and cry to them with one of their greatest victims:

> "O stupid demolishers! for whom are you working?"

It is true that, from time to time, beautiful pages on God, the soul, virtue, immortality, flow from their pen, inspired by the sheer weight of truth. For every soul is naturally Christian. And having, nearly always, been born and brought up in the truth, they only lose it by degrees. But, by a just punishment of their pride, night has succeeded in their soul to the truth they have disowned and betrayed. And after a flight that carries the reader away, turn over the page, and you come across some such avowal as this:

"Ah! my friend, how unfortunate we are, we poor philosophers, for whom the prolongation of our existence is only a hope, an

ardent desire, a fervent prayer! Would that I possessed my mother's virtue and her faith! To argue is to doubt, and to doubt is to suffer! Faith is a sort of miracle. What happiness it gives when it is sincere, when it is strong! How often in my study I have raised my eyes to Heaven, and asked God to reveal to me, and still more to grant me, immortality!"*

You, above all, who are still young, and might be tempted to become the disciple of these teachers, to march under their banner to the conquest of truth, read and meditate on what follows; you will see that the Philosophy of our own day causes us to lose truth, not to find it, and with truth happiness. It will show you the spiritual condition of one of the strongest minds of the last century, when, after a long stay in Paris, he returned for a few days to the paternal roof:

"I found myself under the roof where I had spent my childhood, surrounded by those who had brought me up with such tender care, amidst the objects which had attracted my eyes, appealed to my heart, and influenced my understanding in the happiest days of my life. Every voice I heard, every object I beheld, every spot to which I directed my steps, brought back to life the extinct memories and the obliterated impressions of earlier days. But these

* Santa Rosa.

memories and impressions which awoke in my soul found themselves in widely different company. Everything was the same as of old, excepting me. In that church the holy mysteries were celebrated with the same devotion; as the spring came on the woods, the fields, the fountains would again be blessed; in that house, on the appointed day, an altar would be erected, adorned with flowers and foliage; the parish priest, who had instructed me in the faith, had grown old, but he was still there, still a believer; and all those whom I loved, who surrounded me, were united in heart and in soul, had the same hope inspired by faith. I alone had lost it; I alone existed without knowing the how or the wherefore; I alone, so learned, knew nothing; I alone was empty, troubled, deprived of light, blind and uneasy."*

Was it worth while to have devoted his whole existence to study, to have written with so much charm, lectured with so much brilliancy, enjoyed the admiration and applause of all his contemporaries, in order at the end of his life to regret having left his native village? So much labour, so many struggles, so much suffering, in order to exclaim on the brink of the grave: *I alone existed without knowing the how or the wherefore!*

What a confession! Is it necessary to seek any further to prove our theme: the

* Jouffroy.

impotence of Reason? No, indeed. And if we had only Philosophy to instruct us, we should be obliged here to end our search, and to cry out in unspeakable anguish with a thinker who was snatched away too soon from our midst:

"Beautiful and holy hopes which are fed by prayers and tears, ardent dreams of suffering virtue, fervent desires of great minds which have suffered humiliation, sacred transports of the poor and disinherited ones of the earth at the thought of the future life which awaits them, sublime promises of unrecognized duty, of heroism betrayed by iniquitous circumstance, of sacrifices misunderstood, hopes, transports, dreams, prayers, be silent! You are only the poetic delirium which charmed the infancy of mankind!"*

CHAPTER IV

THE SOLUTION

"*I believe . . . and I expect.*"—NICENE CREED.

I.

Is it possible to believe that God has put into the heart of man such a desire for the infinite, such a longing for immortality, without

* Caro, *L'Idée de Dieu.*

giving him any means of discovering that eternity exists? Would not this expose us to the danger of forfeiting it, and losing it altogether? Is mankind condemned for ever to repeat with the great Prophet of Israel: "Lord, Thou art our Father, and we are clay. . . . Oh! that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and wouldst come down! . . ." ?*

This prayer was the anguished cry of the old world; it is also in our own day the mournful cry of those whose misfortune it is no longer to believe in the Gospel. It was in the same sense, and almost in the same words, that a great genius of the last century, who had fallen back by his own fault into the darkness of paganism, was forced to exclaim:

"Rend the mighty vault that covers all creation; lift the veil from the earth, and reveal Thyself, God of justice and mercy."†

The answer to this unceasing appeal of mankind to His justice and mercy was given by God twenty centuries ago. He has *rent the heavens and come down* to us. Man has encountered Him in the highways, for more than three years was able to *converse with Him*. The God who became man in order to be seen and heard by men could, indeed, speak to them of Heaven, *since He came from there*. Behold Him in front of that multi-

* Isa. lxiv. † De Musset, *Espoir en Dieu*.

tude of men and women, of aged people and tender children, who have flocked to the mountain to hear His voice. It is His first discourse to the people:

"Blessed are the poor . . . for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven! . . .

"Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God! . . .

"Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven! . . .

"Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you . . . be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in Heaven! . . .

"Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth, where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up to yourselves treasures in Heaven."*

The sacred historian, after giving us the whole of this admirable discourse, adds: "The people were in admiration at His doctrine, for He was teaching them as one having power, and not as their scribes and Pharisees."†

Jesus Christ, indeed, does not teach like a rhetorician; He makes no use of oratorical delivery; He does not discuss like a Master before His disciples; he affirms as God: "I am," He says, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Such light is shed by His words,

* St. Matt. v. and vi. † St. Matt. vii

such certainty is evolved from His statements, that the understanding is dazzled, the will subdued, and the soul, enraptured, can only repeat the cry of admiration: "Never did man speak like this man!"

But the words of the God of the Gospel are never more positive than when He speaks of the kingdom of Heaven from which He came, and to which He will soon return in order to prepare a place for us:

"What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?

"If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out . . . it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish rather than that thy whole body go into hell.

"Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of iniquity, so that when you fail they may receive you into everlasting dwellings."*

Not only our soul will live beyond this world. We are *a natural whole*,† in order that our immortality should be perfect, our body must live again with our soul in the world beyond the grave.

The great patriarch of the land of Hus had a foreshadowing, in a heavenly vision, of this splendid mystery of the Divine power and goodness, and his friends had heard him exclaim: *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth.*

* Gospel, *passim*. † This saying is Bossuet's.

*And I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God . . . this my hope is laid up in my bosom.**

But in vain Job asked that these words *might be graven on lead with an iron pen;* they found no echo in the human soul, and the sound of them was lost in the emptiness of time!

Jesus Christ was the Redeemer whom the great seer had saluted across fifteen centuries to come. We hear Him now take up again the prophecy of Job, and out of a hope which men had not dared till then to entertain, so strange did it appear to them, he constitutes a Dogma—that is to say, an absolutely certain Truth: *Amen, Amen, I say unto you, the hour cometh wherein all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that have done good things shall come forth unto the resurrection of life.*†

In order to show that there was nothing in this promise beyond His power to perform, Christ, at the end of His mortal life, summoned together His Apostles, His disciples, and a great crowd of people, to witness the miracle by which He would prove to us all that *the dead in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God.*

Jesus having come to Bethania, as one of His historians relates, *found that Lazarus had been four days already in the grave.*

* Job xix. † St. John v.

Now Bethania was near Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother. . . .

Martha, therefore, as soon as she heard that Jesus was come, went to meet Him. . . . "Lord," she said to Him, "if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died." . . .

Jesus said to her: "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, although he be dead, shall live." . . .

Jesus, therefore, cometh to the sepulchre.

Now it was a cave, and a stone was laid over it.

Jesus said: "Take away the stone."

Martha . . . saith to Him: "Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he is now of four days."

Jesus saith to her: "Did I not say to thee, that if thou believe, thou shalt see the glory of God?"

They took therefore the stone away.

Jesus, lifting up His eyes, cried with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth."

And presently he that had been dead came forth, bound feet and hands with winding-bands, and his face was bound about with a napkin.

*Jesus said to them: "Loose him and let him go."**

O Christ Jesus! as I read these lines I fall at Thy feet, and with Peter Thy Apostle I

* St. John xi.

say to Thee: *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life!** And with him I add: *And we have believed and have known that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God.*† Of that eternal Life which is for each one of us the whole meaning of our present life, of that immortality which is the object of our deepest desire, of the Infinite which our famished souls hunger and thirst for, our human teachers can do no more than stammer. After hearing them we went away with saddened hearts, our minds a blank, our eyes wet with tears. But at Thy feet our dreams are surpassed. Thy hand tears the veil asunder which hides the life beyond the grave, Thy word sheds light on its incommensurable depths. O my Lord and Master! increase the love of Thy immortal reward in the hearts of those who believe in Thy sacred Word. This love will give them the strength to overcome temptation, to despise the world and its attractions, to defy the blows of misfortune and the injustice of men, to go with courage through those days when death comes to rob them of what is dearer than life, of those whom they love, who were their only happiness in this sad land of exile. But we beseech yet more, O all-powerful and merciful God! that into the hearts of those who have the misfortune not to believe in Thee any more Thou wouldst let fall that

* St. John vi. † *Ibid.*

sublime hope which raises and comforts the soul. There is more truth in one word of Thine than in all the books of human teachers. Show them the nothingness of this perishable life, the impossibility of finding happiness on earth. Make them see that those are only shadows here below which they exhaust themselves so miserably in pursuing! Soon, in the clear light which inundates their understanding, in the holy joys which arise in their soul, they too will recognize that Thou art *the Way, the Truth,* and *the Life.* The *Way* by which we march from time to eternity; the *Truth* by which we pass from darkness to light; the *Life* through which we begin here below, in shadow and suffering, an existence to be crowned hereafter with infinite joy and eternal splendour!

II.

"Jesus Christ appears, and immortality is established." This truth, stated in these terms, we owe to the pen of the most bitter enemy of Christian religion.* We have no need to thank him for it. The Dogma of our immortality shines forth from the Gospel with such effulgence as to dazzle the eyes of the blind.

Jesus Christ, by His word and His miracles, His Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascen-

* Voltaire.

sion, has created in the heart of man, not only the hope of immortality, but a love, a passion for it. On their knees on the mountain from which the God-Man had just reascended to Heaven before their eyes, five hundred disciples uplifted their gaze and their hearts towards those mysterious regions in the depths of which they had seen Him disappear. A few days later their number will have swelled to thousands of converts, scattered through Jerusalem and the neighbourhood, then to hundreds of thousands, dispersed throughout the nations of the world. Before the end of the century in which Christ was born they will be counted in millions.

And all these believers in the Gospel will go through life *with their eyes and hearts turned towards Heaven.* A new passion, stronger than any other, has taken possession of their soul, stronger than life, since it dreams of sacrificing it; stronger than death, since it defies it—the passion for Heaven.

It was plainly seen, when only a few weeks after Christ's Ascension the Jews tried to stop the progress of His doctrine by threatening the deacon Stephen, one of His most prominent disciples, with capital punishment. They expected to frighten him with the threat of death; but the young disciple of the Saviour welcomed death as a most

desirable gift! *Looking up stedfastly to Heaven,* we read in the Acts of the Apostles, *he saw the glory of God . . . and he said: "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." And they, crying out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and with one accord ran violently upon him . . . and they stoned Stephen, invoking, and saying: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."**

"After him," says the Père de Ravignan, "came countless generations of faithful souls, in whom the thought of Heaven enkindled love of the most heroic virtues, and a burning desire to attain to them. The martyr at the stake extolled this eternal glory, the reward of his sufferings; in the sacred gloom of the catacombs the early Christians prepared themselves for the blinding glare of the Last Day, and, hidden from the world, penetrated their souls with the deep impression of Divine love. The saints lived in this eternal hope, and continually repeated: *How vile is earth when I raise my eyes to Heaven!*†

Rome beheld before long a new order of athletes in the Coliseum, who entered the arena with a smile on their lips. The simple truth breathes in the triumphant words which a poet puts into the mouth of an early martyr:

"They bade me in their impious rage destroy my altars or die. I have given my

* Acts of the Apostles vii.

† *Conférences de Notre Dame.*

life to God. They may take it, but not dishonour it! In spite of their clamour, I die with a smile, for in death I find happiness!"

Only one fear at times would trouble these lovers of Heaven—the fear, as one of them said, that the wild beasts might not be hungry enough. "Ah! may I not be treated by them like the other martyrs! If they will not come to me, I will go to them, and provoke them, so that they may devour me."*

Not thus, hitherto, had men come to this spot to meet death. Let us pause before this portrait of the dying gladiator, traced for us by the chisel of an artist and the pen of a poet:

"He leans upon his hand—his manly brow
Consents to death, but conquers agony,
And his droop'd head sinks gradually low—
And through his side the last drops, ebbing slow
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one . . .
The arena swims around him . . .
His heart . . . was far away . . . his eyes . . .
. . . Where his rude hut by the Danube lay,
There were his young barbarians all at play,
There was their Dacian mother—he, their sire,
Butchered to make a Roman holiday!"†

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* St. Ignatius of Antioch.

† *Childe Harold: The Dying Gladiator.*

In the park at Versailles there is a copy of this antique, much impaired by age and weather, but still very beautiful. No thoughtful person can contemplate it without feeling his heart swell with indignation against that pagan society *capable of killing this man simply for its amusement!*

Such was the death of a pagan in the arena; and this death appeared so beautiful that it has been immortalized in marble and poetry.

But listen now to how henceforward Christians will meet death in these same amphitheatres. It is not a question of a brave warrior of whom the chances of war have made a gladiator, but of a timid young girl, reduced to slavery by pagan barbarity. Her name is Blandine; she is only just eighteen. Her sex, her age, her innocence, call for protection. But she is a Christian; the judge has condemned her to death, and the people demand that she should be subjected to the most frightful tortures. "We all trembled for this young girl," writes an eye-witness of this horrible scene. "Her mistress, herself one of the victims, feared that this child, so frail and delicate, would give way at the sight of what was in store for her. But Blandine showed such heroism that the executioners, who relieved one another to torture her, from the earliest hour of the day until night-time, ended by owning themselves vanquished. Her body was soon one wound . . . but she seemed to find fresh strength to endure in the very tortures themselves. . . . Blandine remained to the end the last of this phalanx of martyrs. Each day she was brought back to the amphitheatre to witness the martyrdom of her brethren. . . . And on the last day the holy virgin, like a mother

who, having witnessed the triumph of her sons, has led them, decked with palms of immortality, before the King of Glory, she appeared, the only one left, on this field of slaughter. She seemed impatient to rejoin those who had gone before her; one would have thought she was hurrying to a wedding feast. . . . Then the executioners rolled her in a net and threw her to a furious bull. The animal tossed her several times in the air. But the gentle virgin, absorbed by the thought of the eternal joys which would be her reward . . . seemed not to feel the pain. At last the executioner's sword gave the last stroke to the innocent victim. The pagans themselves confessed that they had never seen anyone die like this."*

No, until then no one had died like this. When the gladiator fell in the arena, his head bent forwards toward the ground, his eyes turned to his wound or fixed on the earth which drank his blood, one felt that for him all was over. But the Christian martyr fell with his face turned up to Heaven; an ineffable smile parted his lips, his eyes were raised to the invisible realms above; one felt that for him all was about to begin. It was not death that was coming to him, it was immortality!

In less than three centuries millions were

* Acts of the Martyrs of Lyons.

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dying thus! And after butchering them the pagans came to kneel before their tombs, to implore forgiveness, and to the hope of finding them again one day in eternal life!

After the martyrs arose the doctors. They, too, became enamoured of immortality. They are never more eloquent in their writings than when they seek to communicate to us this passion which inspires them, the most sublime and fruitful of all. "Oh, heavenly country, abode of God," cries St. Augustine, "city of peace, land of vision, mother of my soul, heavenly Jerusalem, when shall I be freed from my present deformity, my scattered personality, and be gathered altogether to thy breast!"

III.

But why linger any longer over the testimony of departed ages? Let us look around us. Has not the idea of immortality which the greatest minds of Greece and Rome were afraid to entertain become the most popular and unconquerable idea of Christian society in our own day? It is not only the priest and the philosopher who believe, without the least hesitation, that after this life the human soul enters on another, defined, complete, and immortal; the unlettered man, the poor working woman, the child in our schools, if

the poison of irreligion has not entered their soul, believes in it as the most certain and most natural thing in the world. How can we doubt it, indeed, with the Gospels in our hand and the Crucifix before our eyes? Is not the Christian Religion a continual vision of immortality? Was it in order to make us happy in this world that the Son of God willed to come down from Heaven and live in our midst? No, His coming had but one object, worthy of Himself and of us—to restore our rights to the heavenly immortality, and to give us at the same time the means by which we might reconquer this imperishable inheritance. The whole religion of the Gospel is resumed in the two lines addressed by the great Apostle to the Colossians he had converted: *Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth.**

Bossuet, also, summed up the whole programme of Christian life in these few words, which do honour to his faith and his genius: "Go forth from time and aspire to eternity."

How these words concerning immortality re-echo in a soul! What enthusiasm, what transports they awaken in it, when that soul is pure, lofty, and generous—that is to say, when that soul is Christian!

"I wish to die," wrote a young girl of fifteen, with all that this world could offer to make her happy. "I wish to die, because

* Epistle to the Colossians iii.

I wish to see Thee, O my God! . . . If I am to do harm in the world, let me die first! Death is a reward, since it is Heaven! . . . Nothing has ever succeeded in making death frightening to me, nothing has ever been able to make the word 'death' gloomy to me. I see it always before me, light and brilliant. I cannot separate it from those two enchanting words: *love and hope!*" And farther on she continues: "Shakespeare says: 'It were better not to be born.' Oh! no, not that, since to know and love God one must be born. Happiness is to die!"*

Let us not think that these feelings sprang from an excited imagination. They are born in the heart of mankind, ever since the days of the Gospel: "O all-powerful spell!" wrote St. Augustine in the fifth century, "death, that death which men faced with terror, has become sweet and desirable, the greatest of all goods."†

These different quotations bring back to our memory the account of an apostolic missionary, who wrote home recently as follows: "The greatest pleasure you can give here [in Japan] to one of our sick Christians is to tell him that his disease is incurable, and that he will soon be in paradise."‡

* *Diary of Eugénie de la Ferronays.*
† St. Augustine, *De quantitate Animæ.*
‡ *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith.*

In our own land a young woman bent over the bed on which her husband, most tenderly loved, had just expired. Yet what do we read, written down in the most intimate record of her thoughts? "And I, I felt then what I could never have believed possible: I felt that *death was happiness.*"*

Yes, death, a Christian death, is happiness for the soul which goes forth from this world, which escapes from this land of exile, this valley of tears. The evils of life are over, and the eternal reward is about to begin.

It may indeed be said that the Christian does not die, but is born into the true life. The Church in her martyrology calls this day *Dies natalis!—The day of birth!* The sadness is for us who cannot follow them, who are still tied down to this false and miserable life on earth. The earth was sad enough already. What will it seem to us now?

"Only one is missing, and the whole world is a desert!"

But in this deep, immense night of sorrow which descends on us, a radiant star, a Divine hope sheds its gleam on our soul: *These beings we love so dearly will never return to us, but we, we shall go to them.* If they returned, it would only be to suffer again, and to weep as we do! No; since we love them truly—

* *Récit d'une Sœur*, vol. i., p. 422.

that is to say, not for our own sakes, but for theirs—which of us could wish to behold them again at such a cost? Let them remain in the *Land of the Living*, while we, who remain in the *Land of Exile*, await, remembering and hoping, the hour of eternal reunion!

We need not be saints in order to rise to such heights as these. It is enough to remember that whatever we love here below, whatever brings us a little happiness, is only a shadow, and that the substance of this shadow is beyond the grave. On the earth we have only beginnings—the beginnings of truth, the beginnings of beauty, the beginnings of love, the beginnings of happiness and immortality, of the infinite. Heaven has in store for us the Divine completions! *Modicum passos ipse (Deus) perficiet!**

It is at the cost of much watching and fatigue that we enjoy here below a few rays of truth; but up above truth whole and entire will inundate us with its Divine radiance!

Only at rare intervals, in fleeting instants, are we given below a glimpse of what is only the shadow of beauty; in Heaven Beauty in all its splendour will delight our soul for ever.

Accompanied with tears, attended by every kind of anxiety, love is permitted to us in this wretched life; but beyond the grave

* Epistle of St. Peter.

our love, like God's love, will be without measure and without an end.

In this world of exile, in short, our joys are fugitive, our happiness is deceitful, and nothing can satisfy the soul; in the world where our reward awaits us the soul will know neither hunger nor thirst, for the ocean of happiness from which it will drink will be eternal and infinite like God Himself.

This is the solution of the great, the only problem of our destiny; and each one of us, whether wise or ignorant, young or old, rich or poor, famous or unknown—each one of us, I say, with his hand on the Gospel, and his eyes upraised to Heaven, may say with absolute certainty:

"I believe . . . and I expect."

BOOK II

GOD

CHAPTER I.—THE MEETING WITH GOD.

,, II.—THE SOUL AND THE VISION OF GOD.

,, III.—THE SOUL AND THE LOVE OF GOD.

,, IV.—THE SOUL AND THE POSSESSION OF GOD.

CHAPTER I

THE MEETING WITH GOD

"What must we do to see God? Be pure and die."—PLATO.

I.

HAVE you ever been present at the last moments of a human life? If so, you know what no tongue can express, the sudden, profound, mysterious stupor which seizes on those who surround the death-bed!

But presently a sort of religious terror invades their hearts. That beloved one who is no longer there, where is he? That body which is growing cold, those eyes which no longer see, those lips which are dumb, they are not he. Where, then, has he gone? To eternity, answers our Christian faith. But where is this eternal world? To cross its threshold, Religion answers again, we must undergo the judgment of God. But where and what is this judgment?

All these questions besiege our mind while we kneel there, weeping and praying. We feel by the emotion which stirs the very depths of our being that something tremendous is happening to the soul which has just departed from us.

Plunged in grief by the side of the bed on which the drama of a human life has just

come to an end, what would we not give to penetrate the sombre mystery which follows the last act? If we might only be permitted a glimpse, just a glimpse, of that eternal world, the doors of which our beloved one has just passed through! If it were possible to follow him even in thought, to discover what has become of him, to form even a remote idea of the existence which is now and will for evermore be his! We would take up our life below again with more courage; our tears would be less bitter, our sorrow less deep, the darkness less black.

But God, to augment our merits, no doubt, has not permitted us to lift the veil of this mystery. Nevertheless, in His great goodness He has allowed a few glimmers of light to reach us from the eternal world, through our reason first, and then through revelation. Let us collect and analyze these scattered lights. At least they will charm away our sorrow for the moment. They may even do more: they may enkindle in us a noble and fruitful enthusiasm for this world beyond the grave, to which our Sacred Books have given its true name when they called it:

The Land of the Living.

II

"God is the abode of spirits as space is the abode of bodies," said a Christian philoso-

pher. This thought, in fact, is only a free but exact translation of St. Paul's text: *In Him we live and move and have our being.**

Therefore, in order to meet God, the soul which leaves this world does not need to be carried far away from the earth, to the depths of the Universe. There was only the veil of the senses between itself and God. Death has torn this veil in two, and immediately the full brilliance of the supernatural world reaches it, envelopes it, penetrates it and dazzles it.

May we be permitted to make a comparison? Let us imagine a man born and grown to manhood in one of those deep subterranean mines hollowed out by human industry in the heart of our mountains, in order to extract the hidden riches of nature. This unfortunate man has never known any other horizon than the walls of his dark cavern, and the pale lamp hanging from the vaulted roof has been his sun; it is by the light of its colourless gleam that he has beheld his dismal abode! Yet he has often been told that a wonderful, splendid world exists above him; he has heard of immense horizons which baffle human vision; an attempt has been made to give him an idea of that orb of day, almost Divine, which, whether visible or invisible, sheds torrents of light from the

* Acts of the Apostles xvii. 28.

farthermost parts of the firmament over a limitless world. But he listens in vain. He questions, he ponders; the images conjured up by his imagination are vague and poor. But one day the mountain is shaken to its foundations, the ground trembles beneath his feet, the walls of his cavern give way, the roof opens above his head. The unfortunate man thinks his end has come. But to his stupefaction and wonder he finds himself enveloped in dazzling light. His prison has crumbled away, the ground is strewn with wreckage; he himself, safe and sound, stands upright in the midst of the ruins! He sees at last the world of which he has so often heard; he sees the sun, which he believed in without being able to form any idea of it—that radiant sun, which he cannot yet bear the sight of, but which he recognizes by the torrents of light it sheds over the magnificent landscape, immense, boundless as it appears to him, which, though it makes him giddy to look at, attracts, intoxicates, and delights him.

This is a picture, but what a faint one! of the soul uplifted above the ruins of its fleshly prison. For a moment, when the prison crumbled to pieces under the shock of death, the soul might well believe that it also was about to perish. But now the truth is made manifest to him; only the prison has

fallen; the prisoner finds deliverance, an entrance into the eternal world, into the *Land of the Living*. This is the world beyond the grave of which he had been told so often, when nothing around him could give him the slightest idea of it; he recognizes it, he sees it before him, with its boundless horizon, its infinite height and breadth and depth.* And the sun of this supernatural world is God Himself, God whom the soul cannot yet bear to contemplate, but who irradiates it already with a dazzling light which envelops it, penetrates it, fills it with delight, and intoxicates it with a happiness before which the vanished joys of its former life seem poor and pitiable indeed.

Yet the soul's most absorbing preoccupation at this terrifying moment, when time ends for it and eternity begins, is the vision of itself. In the light which reaches it from the eternal world, in the very place where its earthly course has come to an end, the soul beholds itself, such as its own works have made it. That is its judgment! The Scriptures tell us, speaking of those who leave this world: *Their works follow them!* Their works indeed have attached themselves to them, have become their substance, their nature, in virtue of that mysterious moral law which St. Augustine asserted: *Thou art what thou lovest.* If these souls have loved

* Apocalypse xxi. 16.

truth, virtue, and goodness, God is their centre, and they are drawn to Him, to live in Him for ever, possessors of unshadowed truth and unmeasured love.

But if they have loved error, injustice, and evil, the light with which they are flooded by God is the lightning flash of the storm which will precipitate them into the eternal abyss. They resemble, to borrow a comparison from our own world, those birds of night which live in darkness, and which, when the haunt in which they hide themselves is destroyed, flee away blinded, distracted, seeking a yet darker hole in which they may find a refuge.

Sound philosophy agrees with our deepest theologians on this subject.

" Let us not form rude ideas of God's tribunal," were the words of a great writer whom France had the misfortune to lose too soon. " The marvellous economy of Providence wills that the laws of spiritual phenomena should be as simple as those which govern physical phenomena. It is a law analogous to the law of attraction which presides over the distribution of punishments and rewards, the law of affinities by which the souls of the dead are led naturally to where their merits or demerits meet with their just due, rising by their own act to a higher condition or sinking to a lower one in the same way that bodies, by reason of their

variation in weight, rise or fall in the atmosphere."*

Therefore, when we leave this world it is not the decrees of Divine justice which raise us up to Heaven or send us down to the abyss of hell, but the actions of our earthly life which decide either our eternal happiness or our eternal misery.

III.

This is not the place in which to speak of those souls who are borne away from God by what Dante calls "the eternal hurricane." We will devote a chapter to this terrifying mystery at the end of this volume. Our present task is a pleasant one; we invite our reader to follow with us the elect soul which God attracts to Himself, in order to be its chief thought, its love, its life, and thus to constitute Himself its eternal happiness.

We should like to be able to say to our dear reader, as Beatrice did to the great Florentine poet: "Thou wilt see such wonderful things that after contemplating them nothing human will ever tempt thee any more."

But our pen is too humble for such a pretension. It will be enough if we can bring him to say that Christian immortality, even seen through the coarse veils of our earthly senses, is such a beautiful thing that no effort,

* Caro, *L'Idée de Dieu.*

no sacrifice, should be too great in order to insure our conquest of it.

Among those who come across this book there are many who will read its pages through a mist of tears. They will evoke the memory of so many who have disappeared from their midst, so many broken affections, so many vanished dreams!

"A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."*

"Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempore felice
Nella miseria.†

Is this a true saying to those who believe in the Gospel? No, a thousand times no! Whatever our present ills, they are outweighed by our hopes of the future. However cold and dark the night of mourning may be which envelopes our soul, the light of eternal day already brightens the horizon.

Let us go forward, then, through the tombs! Those whom we weep for are no longer there.

They will not return! But we shall go to them!‡

* Tennyson, *Locksley Hall.* † Dante.

‡ Lord Byron caused the following words to be engraved on the tomb of his only daughter:

"*I shall go to her, but she will not return to me!*"

This phrase did not express in his mind the hope of immortality; it was a melancholy invocation of nothingness. A just punishment of faith disowned.

It is not for us who are still captives in this land of darkness to pity the lot of those who have entered into the resplendent country.

CHAPTER II

THE SOUL AND THE VISION OF GOD

"The first good of the soul is the knowledge it will have of the Divine Essence."—LUDOLPHE LE CHARTREUX.

I.

"WHERE is the soul, however vast, which has not paused, sadly and thoughtfully, before that one short word: "God"?*

What the sun is to the body God is to our understanding: its light, its heat, and its life. But man is at present in a state of intellectual infirmity and of moral decadence. His greatness lies in his need of God, and his punishment in that he sees Him through a veil of such thickness that he cannot form even an imperfect idea of Him. God is at the same time to us below what is most clear and most hidden: most clear as to His existence, most hidden as to His nature.

One need not be a genius to realize the truth, or rather the anguish, of this cry of a soul in the throes of this need of God.

* Père Lacordaire.

"I cannot think of Him without fear, nor yet without hope; and whatever may be said, the thought of not comprehending Him and yet seeing Him, makes my reason tremble!"*

Of seeing Him! No, that expression is incorrect. It is true that now and then in the great work of creation before our eyes we are permitted to see, here a ray of His Divine power, there a reflection of His goodness, eleswhere a shadow of His beauty. But, owing to the perversion of our faculties, we misconceive this power, we fail to recognize this goodness, we attribute the beauty as often as not to the creature, which thus becomes for us a snare in which our soul is cruelly caught!

Thus we arrive at the gates of the grave. But if we have not forfeited His grace, God is waiting for us on the other side of these gates to reveal Himself to us, no longer through a veil, nor yet mirrored by creatures, but *face to face* and *as He is*, as Scripture tells us. For let us clearly understand that Heaven, for the soul which leaves this world is the vision of God. "Heaven," says St. Thomas, "is an admirable temple, bordered by light and love. . . . It is pure light, intellectual light penetrated with love. . . . The state of Beatitude is founded on the action of seeing, that of loving comes second; and the

* De Musset.

happiness of the Elect, like that of the Angels, is more or less great according as they see the truth more or less clearly."

II.

Let us, above all, guard against that material and childish notion which made the happiness of the Elect consist in their eyes being eternally fixed on a luminous centre from which they derived their happiness.

"What a Heaven!" wrote not long ago a polished writer, whose sarcasm on this occasion is rather too cutting—"what a Heaven in which reigns a placid, almost frozen contemplation of one object, God! The past is forgotten, everything is obliterated, silence would prevail were not the blessed permitted as a favour the privilege of singing without ceasing on one note the same Alleluia. They who thus rest have nothing human left in them; they think no more, they remember no more, they move no more. They contemplate, adore and sing, attached to circles which widen out by degrees, corresponding rays of the same sun, I had almost said spokes of the same wheel, equally straight, equally inflexible, starting together from the same centre. Look at the Paradise of the painters. You see there depicted the idea of all the ages. What are we shown? A blue fluid which grows gradually lighter, a sort of

gulf carpeted with human heads, sanctimonious faces fastened to a pair of wings, the first row very highly finished, the next more lightly treated, the third only faintly indicated, the rest fading away in perspective to a disc, a point placed on an arch. In all of them the same expression, the same smile, the same mouth half-open with the same ecstasy, and in the background, in a focus of light, the triangle with the symbolical dove."*

"This sorry Heaven," says another writer, "is popularized every day, amongst children and the working classes, by millions of common pictures. The Middle Ages imagined nothing better than this monastic eternity, occupied in chanting psalms in the stalls of a gigantic cathedral, built on the summit of the firmament. Many of our most pious and esteemed contemporaries have not advanced on this point beyond the Middle Ages. Is not this frozen beatitude enough to frighten one? Would one not be ready to fly from the dull joys of such a Paradise?"†

In connection with this subject we remember an anecdote which, although amusing, is not without instruction.

It happened in England. A Protestant, a strict Methodist, had taken her child, a

* Madame de Gasparin, *Les horizons célestes.*

† Caro, *L'Idée de Dieu*, chap. vii.

lively young monkey about nine years old, to chapel. The solemn minister held forth for a whole hour on the happiness of the Elect in Heaven. He pictured them with clasped hands and upturned eyes, immovable in ecstasy.

Coming out of chapel, the mother asked the child if he had paid attention to the beautiful sermon.

"Oh yes," replied the boy.

"You see, then, how happy one is in Heaven."

"Oh yes! I should like to go to Heaven. But," he added anxiously, "if I were very good all the week, should I be allowed to go and play with the little devils on Sunday?"

We do not dispute the fact that this dull, motionless Heaven was the conception of the painters and picture-makers, and of certain writers of the Middle Ages, and many of our contemporaries who have never read or studied the question entertain the same belated idea. But in the Middle Ages, as in our own day, consult the true theologians, the great Christian thinkers, and you will be filled with wonder and admiration at the grandeur and beauty of their ideas on Heaven. This, too, was the conclusion finally reached by the author we have just quoted, for soon afterwards he adds: "The great theologians are far from giving us such

ideas of the future life. "What they imagine, indeed, is only a commentary on the words of St. Paul: *God will be all in all.**

Therefore it is not in the depths of the universe, but in ourselves, that we shall behold God. Consequently our soul will contain Heaven in itself. "Heaven," said St. Augustine somewhere, "will be wherever we are."

Does not this truth cast its shadow, or rather its light, over our own world? Those ideas which philosophy calls *first principles*, the ideas which are *necessary, absolute, eternal,* because they come directly from God—for instance, the ideas of Justice, Truth, Goodness, Beauty—where do we find them? Implanted in our own selves; and we never conceive them more clearly nor behold them in a brighter light than when our soul, imposing silence on its external senses, retires within itself in profound meditation.

Take the example of genius: whatever its nature, it retires into solitude, recollects itself, and concentrates itself; then it seems to descend into unfathomable depths where it sees, hears, and takes in wonderful things, so wonderful, so Divine that it despairs of ever realizing them outwardly. What painter has ever succeeded in transferring to his canvas the ideal beauty which his soul

* I. Epistle to the Corinthians chap. xv.

beheld so often when thus self-concentrated? What musician has ever been able to transcribe the sublime harmonies which resounded in the silence of his thoughts? What writer, what poet, what orator can express in words the beauty, the grandeur, and the love which at moments, in the silence of his study, sent through his whole being the "thrill of the Divine"?

Ozanam relates in his letters that when he was a young student Ampère took a fancy to him, and carried his kindness so far as to admit him frequently to his own study, in order that he might work there. More than once he saw the great scholar, in the midst of his scientific researches, forgetting his books, papers, and instruments, clasp his forehead with his hands, and remain thus plunged in contemplation, from which he roused himself, crying: "How great God is, Ozanam! Oh! how great God is!"

But that, here below, is only the rapid passage of God before the sight of the soul; on the threshold of eternity it will be uninterrupted vision. On this side of the tomb it is only the shadow of God; on the other it is God in all His splendour!

"Behind goodness and beauty," wrote a learned man of the last century before politics led him astray—"behind goodness and beauty mankind has always felt the

existence of a sovereign reality in which dwells the ideal, God—that is to say, the centre, the mysterious and inaccessible unity towards which the universal order converges."*

Have you ever watched the sunrise from a mountain-top? Night still reigns on the earth, and only by a vague, slowly spreading glimmer of light do we descry the spot where the orb of day is about to appear. But suddenly a cloud on the rim of the horizon, invisible till then, grows illumined and becomes resplendent. A thousand rays of silver, gold, and purple escape from it, and shed torrents of light in all directions. A man who had never seen the sun might easily take the cloud thus transformed for the sun itself. This cloud is an image of the human soul, which in the night of this world remained unseen. But when the eternal day dawns for it, that day which will never decline—*qui nescit occasum dies*—on the very brink of the infinite horizon it grows light, it is illuminated, and becomes resplendent with a heavenly radiance. And the sun which thus enlightens it is God! God who enters into it with all His power, all His goodness, all His beauty, all His splendour—*Deus, omnia in omnibus.*

Thus, if to us who have never beheld the

* Berthelot.

Divine sun of the eternal world it were granted to behold for an instant this transfigured soul, as it is related of some of the saints, we should, like them, believe that we had rejoiced for a moment in the vision of God. Listen to the author of the *Imitation* on this subject:

"Oh! if thou hadst seen the everlasting crowns of the saints in Heaven, and in how great glory they now triumph . . . thou wouldst immediately cast thyself down to the very earth!"*

III.

This beautiful theological teaching, which is also so conformable to human reason, brings a very comforting hope to our hearts. These souls we so dearly love, when they quit time to enter eternity, are not then entirely separated from us. We speak here of the souls which attain beatitude, not those which go into eternal suffering. The latter, alas! are borne away to immeasurable distances from us, and the light of the abysmal fires brings them no other vision than that of their horrible misfortune!

St. Thomas, indeed, thought the doctrine probable that *if the souls which have left this world know what passes on earth, it is not through their own nature, but by the effect of grace.* "One cannot believe," says the

* Book iii., chap. xlvii.

angelical doctor, quoting St. Gregory the Great,* whose opinion he is inclined to share, "that anything outside could remain hidden from men who see in the light of God."†

In a certain sense, then, these souls are nearer to us after death than during their earthly life. For it is true to say sin, not death, divides souls. They see us and hear us constantly. God has not permitted that we should do the same; they would have seemed so beautiful to us that we might have made idols of them!

Of old, imprisoned in their bodies, they often lived far away from us, and we often found great difficulty in letting them know of our joys and sorrows, our dangers and sufferings. But now anywhere and at any moment we may have recourse to them. Does not the Church permit us—nay, even invite us—to address our prayers to them? How beautiful to the mind and how comforting to the heart is that prayer which so many Catholics recite every evening: "O blessed souls! who have already attained to glory, obtain for me from Him who is our common God and Father that I may never offend Him by mortal sin, and that He would take away from me all that is displeasing to Him in me."

* *Morale*, book xi

† *Summa Theologica*, prima pars, Q. LXXXIX., Art. 4.

Why should we speak to these souls if they could not hear us ?

These are mysteries, no doubt, which our reason cannot penetrate in this earthly darkness. But these mysteries, though they dazzle and thereby blind our reason, go home to our hearts !

Following this train of thought, the anecdote, taken from a book by a reliable writer, which we subjoin, will be read with interest:

" I had in my family "—it is a Polish lady of high rank who tells the story—" a striking example of a sad case of unbelief which was happily followed by a glorious conversion. My ancestor, Prince Lubomirski, who was surnamed the ' Solomon of Poland,' denied the existence of God and his own soul, in order to abandon himself without restraint to the indulgence of his passions. He even began a great book on this theme, which he sat up night after night to write. One day, fatigued and troubled in mind by the task he had set himself, he prolonged his daily walk beyond its usual limits, and met an old woman, who was loading an ass with dead leaves.

" ' Have you no other means of livelihood ?' he asked.

" ' Alas ! no. My husband supported the family. I have had the misfortune to lose him, and I have not even enough money to pay for a Mass for the repose of his soul.'

"'Here,' he said, throwing her several pieces of gold. 'Have as many said as you like.'

"He returned to the house without paying much attention to the blessings she showered on him. That same evening, engaged with ardour in his favourite pursuit, he saw a peasant standing motionless in front of his writing-desk.

"'What are you doing there? Who gave you leave to enter?' cried the Prince, violently ringing the bell in order to reprimand his servants for their carelessness.

"They, however, protested that they had seen nothing, and the mystery remained unexplained.

"The next day, at the same hour, the silent, elusive apparition returned. This time my ancestor did not summon anyone, but, casting aside his pen, he walked straight up to the peasant.

"'Whoever you are, what have you come here to seek?'

"'I am the husband of the widow you assisted two days ago: I have asked God to let me repay your charity by these words: *The soul is immortal!*'

"The phantom immediately disappeared, and Prince Lubomirski, calling together his family in haste, tore up his manuscript before them.

"These lacerated pages are still in exist-

ence. The orator who preached the funeral oration over Lubomirski in the Cathedral at Warsaw had heard the above facts from the Prince himself; he repeated the statement in the pulpit, and it is set down in our family archives."

These pious hopes, which we have endeavoured to convey in feeble and hesitating language, are what St. Augustine, the greatest doctor of the Church, like us, but better than us, foresaw with prophetic instinct when he exclaimed soon after the death of his beloved friend, Nebridius: "There, in the bosom of God, my Nebridius lives. . . . There he drinks in wisdom to his heart's content. Yet I do not believe that he is so inebriated with this heavenly wisdom as to forget me. For how should he forget me when Thou, O Lord, who dost inebriate him, rememberest me?"

Ozanam expresses the same feelings when some years after the death of his mother, so dearly loved, he writes to a friend:

"It is true that there is nothing more heartrending than this long absence, nothing more mournful than the growing solitude, the emptiness which death creates around us, and at first every thought of consolation seems an impossibility, an offence, even, to our sorrow. I have known this state of

* *Confessions,* book ix., chap. iii., No. 3.

mind; but it did not last long. After a while I began to feel that I was not alone, that something infinitely sweet was taking place within me; it was like an assurance that I had not been left desolate, like an invisible but beneficent proximity, as though a beloved soul in passing had caressed me with its wings. And as formerly I recognized my mother's step, her voice, her very breathing; so now when a fresh inspiration rekindled my fervour, when a virtuous thought came into my mind, when a salutary impulse moved my will, I could not help thinking that it was still she. Now, when two years have elapsed, when time has tested what might have seemed the first fancies of an imagination troubled by grief, I feel the same; there are moments when my heart leaps with a sudden joy, as though she were there, by my side; there are, when I need it most, hours of intercourse between mother and son, when I weep, more, perhaps, than in the first months of my grief, but an ineffable peace mingles with my sadness. When I am good, when I have done something for the poor she loved so much, when I am at peace with the God she served so well, I see her smile from afar. Sometimes when I pray, I seem to hear her prayer uniting with mine, as it did when we prayed together at night at the foot of the Crucifix."

CHAPTER III

THE SOUL AND THE LOVE OF GOD

"The second good of the soul is the love of God."—LUDOLPHE LE CHARTREUX.

I.

"LOVE is an excellent thing, a great good indeed. . . . Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing higher, nothing more generous, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in Heaven or earth; for love proceeds from God, and cannot rest but in God."*

This page, taken from a book which might have come down from Heaven, is not only beautiful, but eminently philosophical. To know in order to love, and to love in order to be happy, that is the whole of man, and, if we might dare to say it, that is the whole of God. And why should we not say it? Did not one of the most holy doctors of the Church write: *Love is so great a thing that it triumphed over God Himself!* †

Yes, love triumphed over God for the first time in the Creation. For it was in order to be known and loved that God drew the universe out of nothingness, and peopled it with

* *Imitation*, book iii., chap. v. † St. Bernard.

creatures endowed with intelligence and capable of love.

It triumphed a second time, more wonderfully still, in the Incarnation, since it was to bring man back to the knowledge and love of Him that the Man-God was born at Bethlehem and died at Golgotha. The whole programme of the mystery of the Incarnation, more prodigious still than that of the Creation, is summed up in these words of Jesus Christ: *I have come to bring fire on the earth, and what will I but that it should be kindled?* Is not the symbol in which all Christian religion is summed up and glorified *a Cross,* that is to say love pushed to the sublimest folly?

We are reminded here of a story, which, simple as it is, gives a powerful illustration of what we have just been writing about.

A few years ago a brilliant entertainment was given in one of those magnificent country places in the neighbourhood of Paris. A young woman, much talked of in the world, who was already beginning to be famous, had been invited. The party was a great success, and continued so late that the guests were obliged to accept their host's hospitality for the rest of the night. The famous actress was conducted to her rooms, and her eyes were at once riveted by a large Crucifix, an ivory Christ thrown

up in relief on a large ebony Cross. This poor worldling knew nothing of religion. Had she received baptism? Perhaps. But what is certain is that she had never read the Gospel. It was simply out of curiosity that she drew near to the Crucifix. But what she saw captivated and moved her. "What a horrible punishment!" she said to herself. "Nails in His feet! In His hands! A crown of thorns on His head! No criminal has ever been put to death with such tortures! And yet, how strange! What calmness, what goodness, what beauty in this man's face even in death!" And the poor actress stays there, fascinated by the vision of Christ on the Cross. The longer she looks, the more she is drawn and troubled. Until at last, vanquished by grace, she falls on both knees on the kneeling-chair in front of her, where she passes the remaining hours of the night.

What passed in that mysterious colloquy between this pagan and the Divine Crucified One? No one ever knew. But some time afterwards attention was drawn to an inscription scratched apparently with a gilt pin on the ebony of the Cross, at the very feet of the Christ, with the following words: "*That is what love means!*" On her return to Paris her first step was to seek out a priest who would consent to instruct her in the Catholic Faith. A few months after-

wards she made her first Communion. But God, unwilling no doubt to expose her soul to the dangerous temptations of a world which idolized her, soon called her to her eternal home.

That is what love means! Was not this the cry which the remembrance of the tragedy on Calvary drew from St. John, the beloved Apostle: *Sic Deus dilexit mundum!* By what miracle did this darkened soul, after nineteen centuries, thus coincide in feeling with the Apostle who had rested his head on the heart of the God-Man?

II.

But on this subject of all others: *The love of God in Heaven,* the human tongue can only stammer.

Already, on this earth, when God is pleased to allow a spark of love, even of the purely natural order, to fall on our hearts of flesh, does not an inexpressible happiness lighten for the moment our labours, disperse our sorrow, and give fresh value to life, or rather make us live once more? "All of life is in love," wrote a profound theologian of our own time. "The soul which lives the fullest life below in the sight of God is the soul which loves most."*

* Mgr. Gay, *De la Vie et des Vertus Chrétiennes.*

It is not necessary to be a profound thinker in order to be convinced of this truth. The mother who clasps in her arms the child she tenderly loves may be only a poor working woman, but she is conscious of something infinite in her heart. The young man whose heart is still pure, the young girl whose angelic soul is aglow with ardour, both feel that there is an eternal quality in their love. To love one another only on earth—who in the first enthusiasm of youth would entertain such a miserable thought? *Love is strong as death.* Yes, and stronger than death. Thus, when death comes to shatter one of our earthly affections we cannot believe that all is eternally ended.

"Can one doubt beside a grave?"

An instinctive conviction stronger than reason makes us raise our heads and look up to Heaven: the feeling that we who have loved a little this cherished creature on earth in the midst of tears and sorrow will love it hereafter in a better land in unending felicity.

What did all the other goods of life, riches, honours, joys even, weigh in comparison with their affection? Have we not seen kings who esteemed themselves happier to have a friend than to possess a kingdom? A man would not give a drop of his blood to save the whole Universe; but for the

feeblest of creatures, if he loved him and was beloved by him, he would give, without counting the cost, his blood and his life.

III.

Let us not wonder at the power of love. The source of every lawful affection is God. There are not several sources of love, any more than there are several sources of truth. From the depths of eternity God lets fall on a creature a few reflections of His goodness, His justice, His power, but above all of His beauty; we see these reflections, and at once love springs from our soul, captivates it and overpowers it.

"The beauty which the Christian adores," wrote Chateaubriand, "is not a perishable beauty; it is the eternal Beauty for the sake of which Plato's disciples were in haste to quit the earth. To its lovers here below it only shows itself veiled, it wraps itself as though with a mantle in the folds of Creation; for if a single one of its glances were to fall directly on the heart of man he could not bear it, he would melt away with delight."*

It is precisely this uncreated Beauty which awaits the soul on the threshold of eternal life, in order to reveal Itself. What do I say? In order to bestow Itself. For

* *Génie du Christianisme.*

in Heaven the Elect not only see the essence of Beauty in all Its splendour; this Beauty comes to meet them at the eternal gates. It gives Itself to them, and presently they possess It, and are most intimately united to It. The meetings of the soul with the Divine Beauty on earth have only been ephemeral betrothals; in the Land of the Living it will be an eternal marriage. *I will espouse thee to Me for ever*, said the Lord to the soul in the Holy Scriptures, *and thou shalt know that I am the Lord.**

Let us listen to Bossuet's endeavour to give us in his grand language a hint, at least, of this incomparable mystery: "God will seek in the depth of the soul that part of it which is most susceptible to happiness. Joy will enter into it with too much abundance to be conveyed by the ordinary channels; the openings must be enlarged, and an extraordinary capacity must be given to it. God will not consider what He has hitherto done with the soul, but what He can yet do with it. He will give then the finishing stroke to His work. We cannot conceive it, miserable apprentices that we are. He will twist and turn our mind in every direction, to fashion it to His liking, and will only consider our natural disposition in so far as not to do it violence." †

* Osee ii.

† Sermon on the Happiness of the Saints.

Let us only retain, if you like, one sentence from this beautiful page: *miserable apprentices that we are!* For, at present, all our joys are only an apprenticeship, since all our affections are only outlines.

Mother, who formerly in this land of exile pressed your child to your heart with such delirious joy, you thought yourself happy; but your happiness, like your love, was only an apprenticeship.

Child, to whom the sight of your admirable mother brought tears of joy, you thought when you knelt at her feet that you were already in Paradise; but that paradise was only an outline.

Christian husband and wife, formerly when you loved one another in God, you thought you felt in your souls a foretaste of heavenly joys; now, if you look back on these earthly joys, it is with a sense of pity.

Artists, in love with the ideal, who dreamt in your hours of inspiration that you beheld beauty without a shadow, or heard harmonies denied to mortal ears, see, hear, and understand that all this was only a beginning.

Great thinkers, writers, philosophers, who, bending over your books, absorbed in thought, are lost in contemplation of a truth which seems to you so beautiful that in its pursuit you sacrifice everything, even life itself, see now and know that what

you thought was the sun was only a tiny spark which had fallen from the Divine hearth, and lost itself in the night.

And you, souls whom the earth could not satisfy, who understood so soon that it had only a few drops of love to offer when you needed torrents to satisfy your thirst; you, who turning from the world and its deceitful pleasures, have sought refuge in the solitude of the cloister, or the austere devotion of the priesthood, in order to live nearer tō God, at times no doubt, in the vaulted cloister, before the altar, at the foot of the Crucifix, you felt in moments of ecstasy a foretaste of Heaven.

" It was a vast love which you drank from the depths of the chalice, filling your hearts, mysterious monks. And when your eyes closed in slumber, the Saviour's head reposed on your hair-shirts; when the organ pealed forth at dawn, your eyes sought Him still in the golden glory of your stained glass windows. You loved ardently. Oh ! you were happy indeed !"*

Yes, indeed, Christian souls, you were happy with a happiness that the world could never bestow. Yet these ecstatic moments were only fugitive betrothals. Behold at last the day of the Divine and mysterious marriage ! That which before you were

* De Musset.

bound to believe you now see; that which you could only invoke with ardent desires you now possess for ever. The God whom you pursued with your love, but who, in order to leave you the merit of seeking Him, concealed Himself in the shadow of His mysteries, now comes towards you in all the splendour of His glory. You, too, may sing those words which the Church on earth puts into the mouth of a great Christian martyr when she enters Heaven: *He whom I desired I now see; what I hoped for I now possess; to the God whom I loved on earth I am now united in Heaven. . . .** Your happiness also, like the love from which it springs, will be henceforward without end and without measure.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOUL AND THE POSSESSION OF GOD

"The third good of the soul is the possession of God, whom it sees and loves."—LUDOLPHE LE CHARTREUX.

I.

ON leaving this world, the purified soul sees God; seeing Him it loves Him, and loving Him springs towards Him with the whole strength of its love. To see, love, and possess; to see the Truth, to love Beauty,

* Office of St. Agnes.

to possess the infinite Good, in these three words the whole teaching of Christian theology as to our life beyond the grave is resumed.

To those whose minds rise above the preoccupation of material things we put the question: Is it possible to conceive a doctrine more in harmony with the most sublime aspirations of human reason?

This noble longing for the Infinite which leaves us no rest, which is found in the depths of our joys as well as in the midst of our sorrows, is, indeed, the need of God, and each one of us may say with the Doctor of Hippo: "Lord, Thou didst make us for Thyself; and our soul will never cease to feel trouble and agitation until it finds rest in Thee."

We will endeavour to show in a few words how we may attain to this rest in the possession of God.

II.

"The Infinite is not an abstraction which has no living reality: it lives, it thinks, it loves, it is free, it has a famous name inscribed on the face of all life, like the proper name of life itself: it is called God."*

This Infinite Being we have either desired, pursued, and loved in this world, or else we have despised and hated it. When the soul crosses the threshold of eternity, the human being does not undergo any essential

* Père Lacordaire.

modifications; what already exists in it is only strengthened and rendered immortal. It is therefore the love or hatred of the Infinite—that is to say, of God—that is rendered immortal in the soul.

As we have already said, the world of spirits has its laws as well as the world of bodies. The fundamental law of the world we now inhabit is universal gravitation. All bodies are attracted to one centre by direct reason of their weight—that is to say, of their substance. In the world of spirits the fundamental law is love. The soul which eternity finds without love will go and fall far away from God, at an incommensurable distance, in remote regions, those undefined deserts of which Scripture tells us that they are inhabited by eternal horror: *Ubi sempiternus horror inhabitat.** There this soul can never more see God; by the light which reaches it, it can only behold itself, its own perversity, and its own ugliness.

> "The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

To see itself thus, and forcedly to hate itself, is part of its eternal punishment.

But, on the contrary, the soul which the dawn of eternity finds with the desire, the will to love God, will find itself fixed for ever in the irresistible attraction which draws it.

* Job x. 22.

In its mortal life, since it could not rise up to God, God descended to it; but now that its earthly bonds are broken it ascends to God, rising *from light to light*, as our Sacred Books tell us.

Yet we must not think that in this impulse of the soul towards God our will is destroyed and our freedom annihilated. We can move freely in the True, the Beautiful, and the Good, since we are surrounded by the Infinite. How shall we find any limits to an ocean that is without limits? True liberty does not consist in being able to do wrong; it would be as true to say that the fulness of life lies in being able to commit suicide. God is supremely free, even as He is supremely good; but no one will pretend that He has the power to commit evil. The mere utterance of such a thought resembles blasphemy. In Heaven we shall participate in the Divine perfections; we shall therefore be free with the liberty of God. The very essence of this liberty will be to tend with our whole strength towards the Divine perfections, in the midst of unimaginable happiness.

III.

Heaven, said a choice soul, *will be to be able to love in peace*. A profound thought. Here on earth we cannot even love God in

security. Every believing soul has its hours of ecstasy; but how rare they are, and how quickly they pass!

The great Apostle had been caught up to Heaven; he had seen there truths and tasted joys which it is not given to man to utter. But soon after this night enveloped his soul. Favoured by this darkness, Satan drew near and subjected him to the most humiliating temptations. Paul groaned, and prayed to be delivered, but God left him to struggle with the Tempter! It is the law of this life! *Unhappy man that I am!* cried the seer of celestial visions then, *who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The good which I will I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do!**

Jerome fled from the world; he retired into solitude, to Bethlehem, to be nearer the vestiges left of the God-Man. There he lived in meditation and prayer. Yet Hell did not leave him in peace. Visions of Rome and its pleasures came often to trouble him in his solitude; books, prayers, and tears were powerless weapons against them! We see him at times descend to the dry bed of a torrent, arm himself with a fragment of stone, and inflict wounds on his breast, already emaciated with fasting and study!

* Epistle to the Romans, vii.

Benedict, called by Heaven to be the great founder of monastic life in the West, left his family and the world in his earliest youth—he was only fourteen—to seek the wild solitude of Subiaco, in order to love God with greater fervour. But the enemy of mankind followed him, and before long the most perfidious temptations assailed this angelic soul. The sanctity of this young and heroic solitary soul became so great that miracles burst forth around him on every side; but the conflict in his soul against the spirit of evil continued to be so terrible that he was seen on certain days to throw himself almost naked in the midst of thorn-bushes, roll there a long time, and come out all wounded and bleeding.

It is at such a price and with such uncertainty that one loves God in this world !

Have we, at least, a greater security in the love we feel for those whom God has given us to love here below ? Alas ! God may be faithfully loved, if not in peace, yet by the help of efforts and conflicts which purify and strengthen our love. But what peace have we in our affection for these fondly cherished beings whom God has placed beside us, whom He has commanded us to love as ourselves, and whom we often love better than ourselves ? The chances of life divide us from them, misfortunes fall upon them, and

finally death, inevitable death, takes them away from us for ever!

Oh! how good it will be in Heaven, where we shall feel that we can never wilfully offend God again, and that we can never more lose those whom we love!

IV.

In point of fact, is a good really a good which must one day come to an end? "What do I care for what may one day finish?" a philosopher said; "the hour which awaits me in sixty years is already by my side. I do not care for that which makes ready, approaches, arrives, and is then no more. . . . I wish for some good, some dream, some hope ever before me, greater than my anticipation of it, greater than all which passes away."* These noble desires are to be found in every human soul, but Christian immortality alone is vast enough to contain them here below, Divine enough to realize them on a future day.

Heaven, indeed, will not only be the place *where we shall love in peace*, but also the place where we shall love *eternally*. Here we love in time, *that moving image of an immovable eternity*,† and therefore all, in us and around us, is inexorably doomed to change. Our

* De Senancourt, *Oberman*.

† Definition of Plato.

hours, days, and years unite to form a mysterious river, an irresistible torrent which bears away our ideas, our affections, our loves and our joys, until at last the torrent bears us away also to the unfathomable gulf in which all things and all men disappear. The abyss of time, the abyss of space! these are the two unfathomable depths over which hangs our poor human reason, beside itself! . . .

But up above begins the *immovable eternity*. A limitless ocean, an eternal repose will then have succeeded to the torrent which passes and bears us away: an unchangeable ocean of light and love.

Therefore, even now, raising our eyes and our thoughts to the shores of our eternal country, we Christians may truly repeat in our prayers, from the depths of this valley of tears:

"O most happy mansion of the city above! O most bright day of eternity, which knows no night, but is always enlightened by the Sovereign Truth; a day always joyful, always secure, and never changing its state for the contrary. Oh! that this day would shine upon us, and all these temporal things would come to an end!"*

* *Imitation*, book iii., chap. xlviii.

BOOK III

THE PLACE OF IMMORTALITY

CHAPTER I.—WHERE IS HEAVEN AT THE PRESENT TIME?

„ II.—THE COMPLETION OF THE UNIVERSE.

„ III.—THE PRINCIPLES OF SCIENCE.

„ IV.—THE TEACHINGS OF FAITH.

CHAPTER I

WHERE IS HEAVEN AT THE PRESENT TIME?

"I leave behind me the world I inhabited; and light in its giddy flight bears me millions of miles away."—CARDINAL NEWMAN.

I.

WHITHER go the souls that leave this world of ours?

This is a profound mystery, of which our reason, and still more our heart, seeks sorrowfully to raise the veil.

It was not only the disciples of the Gospel who were tormented by this problem of the life beyond the grave. Whoever believes in the survival of the soul turns his gaze towards the gloomy gates of the grave. He has seen father, mother, husband, wife, a child, brothers, friends disappear behind them. He gazes, he listens, he ponders. What has become of those we so dearly loved? We can neither see nor hear them any more. But they—do they not see us? Do they not hear us? Is this mysterious world which they inhabit far from the earth? What is the new life which they lead there? Do they still remember those whom they

loved on earth? Do they love them still? Do they still take an interest in the affairs of the land of exile?

How many books have been written in the endeavour to give an answer to these questions! And how many grief-stricken souls have sought and devoured them, thinking to find hope in their sorrow, a little calm in the midst of their anguish! But unless they are inspired by the religion of Christianity they are only hollow romances.

This, in a few words, is the whole history of their composition. Their authors seize on the discoveries of astronomy. They colour the sombre hues of borrowed learning with the lighter and more attractive tints of their own fancy, and draw an enchanting picture of those stars to which, according to them, the souls which migrate from this earth wend their way; they then assimilate our Christian ideas on the qualities of glorious bodies; and, with all the audacity of an uncontrolled imagination, they proceed to describe for our benefit the happiness enjoyed by these souls in the new worlds they inhabit.

These books are false, but seductive—above all, dangerous—for their logical conclusion has been, and will be, for more than one reader in mourning and in tears, *suicide*.

And, indeed, if in order to find those for whom I weep and to part from them no

more, to live their life, share their happiness, love them with a love which is only foreshadowed on earth, it is sufficient to die, why wait any longer? Why remain amidst the mourning, the darkness, the sufferings of this world?

The words of a pagan philosopher are sufficient in themselves to show the feebleness and fallacy of these books. However great may be the learning of their authors, the magic of their style, the fascination of their descriptions, the happiness that they offer is miserable indeed! Besides, their Heaven is empty, for God is not in it! "Ye who invite me to paradise, it is not paradise I seek, but Him who made it."*

It requires nothing less than the Infinite to satisfy the craving of our soul. This was indeed the promise made to man by God Himself in the Holy Scriptures: *I am . . . thy reward exceeding great.*†

II.

Let us leave on one side these dreams which savour too much of this world, and return to the Christian idea. We, the disciples of Christ, also seek to penetrate the mystery of the day after death, but our search is made easy because our hope is certain. We sing with joyful hearts in our

* *Voyage de Chardin.* † Gen. xv.

churches: *Credo . . . et exspecto.* And when we kneel on the cold marble which covers the mortal remains of those who have gone before us, we raise our heads and look up to Heaven through our tears, repeating the two words which have vanquished death and the ages: *I believe . . . and I expect.*

This should be sufficient for us, no doubt, if properly understood, but the religion we love does not forbid us, nevertheless, to turn our eyes towards the eternal world, the world which contains half of our soul—did I say half?—far more, very often, for those who have gone there were sometimes dearer to us than our own life. How could we, then, remain indifferent to the mystery of their eternal destiny?

In the first place, we know that these souls have found God on the other side of the gates of the grave; they are lost in Him, swallowed up in an ocean of which they will never find the bottom nor the shore. Rest and light—these are the two factors of their new life. And when the Church makes us pray for these souls, lest some earthly stain should keep them back for a time from their ultimate end, these are the words, full of depth and beauty, which she puts on our lips: *Lord, give them eternal rest in eternal light!*

But are those dear ones who have disappeared from our midst so spiritualized by

death that nothing remains of their bodily life? It is a difficult problem which can never be solved in this world. Yet St. Thomas says that it is rational to suppose that souls, after death, keep those principles in virtue of which they will one day reorganize their bodies about them.

Even in this life it is granted to us to see how deeply the soul impresses itself on the body. "I believe," said St. Augustine, "that the motions of the soul have some effect on the body, which reveals itself in spite of the heaviness and dulness of our senses; anger, sadness, and joy express themselves visibly. . . . The outward marks of the motions of the soul may remain and become habitual."*

See, indeed, around you: in coarse and material natures you can hardly discern a gleam of sentiment, a flame of feeling beneath the rude outer covering. The body seems so opaque that it stifles the soul beneath the weight of the flesh. Refined and delicate natures, on the contrary, are diaphanous and translucent, like alabaster, through which the soul sends forth rays of goodness, sweetness, intelligence, and energy.

The soul takes these powers with it when it leaves the earth; they are an essential part of its being; and it is by the exercise of these powers that it sometimes returns to

* Letter to Nebridius.

manifest itself to the living. "How is it," we read again in the writings of St. Augustine, "that the dead reappear in their homes, and are seen, by day and by night, by people who are awake? I have heard of it more than once. It is also related that at certain hours of the night sounds and groans are often heard in places where bodies are buried, and especially in churches. Did not the soul of Samuel appear in bodily form when Saul evoked it? Did not Moses, who was buried after his death, appear with a body on Mount Thabor, by the side of the Lord?"*

Everyone is at liberty to accept or reject these theories; but nobody can deny that they afford an answer to many objections, and, in addition to this, they agree with the data of modern science on the vital principle, which is thus defined by philosophy and physiology: *A force which exists in the midst of matter and governs it.*†

They also explain the general belief of the Catholic Church which shows us Heaven as a distinct place prepared by God for the just, and towards which they take their flight on leaving this world. Let us listen on this subject to the Angel of the Schools: "As soon as a soul is freed from its body, it springs towards Heaven, unless a sense of guilt

* Letter of Evodius, Bishop of Uzola, to St. Augustine.

† Flourens, *De la vie et de l'intelligence.*

checks this impulse until the moment when it has been purified by expiation."*

But where is this distinct place which Christian faith calls Heaven to be found?

III.

A deep thinker of our own time has written:

"All these worlds which are revealed to us by the power of the telescope, or the still greater power of calculation, are in reality only one world which is given in free usage to the living denizens of the Universe. As there is only one God, so there is only one Universe. This earth itself revolves in Heaven, is one of the elements of Heaven, and represents for us a place of abode in Heaven. Peaceably seated on this earthly barque, already we float in the infinite, our eternal habitation. What a spectacle is that which presents itself to him who knows how to comprehend it! Immensity comes to life before our eyes, in those starry depths of the sky where each morsel of dust is a world; I cannot distinguish the people, but I see the beacons which summon them together, and I like to think that the rays which reach us here are the same rays that enlighten our celestial brethren.†

* St. Thomas, *Sup. ad tertiam*, q. lxix., Art. 2.

† Caro, *L'Idée de Dieu.*

This page is more brilliant than true. It would be true with regard to the heavenly Spirits if they came to inhabit our earth, for they possess within themselves the vision of God, and through this vision they are always and everywhere in Heaven. But we, poor sons of Adam, poor daughters of Eve, alas! we know only too well that the world we inhabit does not represent to us an abode in Heaven! The hurricane of sin has passed over our globe, and of a world which should have been a *Paradise* for man, it has made a *valley of tears*. In future, to gain possession of Heaven, we must die—that is to say, we must leave our body in the grave, and quit this home of darkness and suffering.

The faith of the poor working woman and the science of the most profound theologian alike place Heaven in those remote and mysterious regions beyond the space which we see.

But before this word *space* the man who reflects pauses, hesitating and confounded. Pascal has with justice described it as *terrifying;* and Balmès has written concerning it the following page, which, having read, we should meditate on long and deeply, our eyes closed and our heads buried in our hands:

"Space! Profound mystery! the deepest, perhaps, in the natural order of all which can be proposed to man's feeble reason; the

deeper we go the more obscure it becomes. The mind seems submerged in this darkness which we imagine beyond the limits of what we know, in the incommensurable depths of the Infinite. Truth and falsehood, illusion and reality, pass before us, but we cannot distinguish them. Our mind may come to decisive conclusions on other matters, but they are valueless here, because they are opposed by others which appear equally conclusive. Man seems to have found here the limit imposed by the Creator to his investigations. On the point of passing it his strength fails him, he faints in the vain endeavour; he cannot breathe; he is without the element which makes him live."*

It was to these "*depths of the Infinite*" that His disciples watched Christ Jesus rise on the day of His Ascension. They are the regions "on the threshold of which the spirit of man faints in its vain endeavour" to which the Apostle St. Paul refers when he tells us that *Jesus Christ, ascending on high, ascended above all the heavens.*†

St. Thomas‡ asks why the risen Christ did not remain in this earthly world. He gives this reason especially amongst others: "The dwelling should be suitable to him who

* Balmès, *Fundamental Philosophy*, ii.
† Epistle to the Ephesians, iv.
‡ *Summa Theologica, sup.*, Q. LVIII., Art. 1.

inhabits it." And the great theologian draws the conclusion that our world was neither great nor beautiful enough to contain the glory of the Son of God.

It is a certain fact that it is of the essence of a body, even a body transfigured by glory, as the body of Jesus Christ was, and as ours will be after the general Resurrection—it is, as I say, of the essence of a body to occupy a space, therefore to reside in a place, in a world.

It is this world, itself transfigured by glory, that Christ Jesus inhabits at present. As God He is everywhere, but as God-Man it is there that He lives, henceforward immortal and glorious, in the company of His Mother, the Virgin Mary, whose holy body the Angels, according to a tradition universally accepted in the Church, came to take from the tomb in order that her Divine Son, anticipating in her case the triumphs of the general Resurrection, might have her even now by His side, on a throne of glory.

There, too, they live again, with their bodies reclaimed from the tomb, those mysterious dead, the Prophets, no doubt, who on the day of Christ's agony rose from their riven sepulchres in order to come to Calvary and behold with their own eyes that stupefying vision: The Messias Crucified !*

* *Cf.* Dom Calmet, *The Holy Bible*, vol. xi. *Resurrection of the Holy Fathers.*

Thither went the numberless legions of the just whom Jesus Christ visited between His death and Resurrection in the world where they had waited so long for His coming, and who came to meet Him on the day of His Ascension, and form His escort on His re-entrance into His heavenly kingdom.*

Lastly—and what a consoling thought this should be to our wounded hearts!—it is there in a glory so great that the eyes of the great Apostle, to whom the vision was vouchsafed for an instant, could not bear its splendour, in the midst of such happiness that nothing on this earth, he tells us, could give an idea of it—it is there that they live, those beloved beings who have left us. Only their flesh, the garment which covers the soul, remains below, like the mantle which Elias left behind in the hands of his disciple Eliseus when he ascended to Heaven. But their soul has flown beyond the limits of space towards the God whose possession deifies their intelligence, their will, and their love.

Yet, in spite of the incommensurable distance which seems to separate them from this world of darkness, they remember us and they love us. More than this, they see us in God and by God. Only sin could create between us and them an abyss which they could not cross. But if faith enlightens our understanding, if prayer raises our soul

* Corneille de la Pierre, *Loco citato.*

to Heaven, if grace already makes us live the life of God, we may say with certainty—we are less separated now from these beings so dearly loved than when they were living beside us in the land of exile.

It is true that they will not return to us. What would they do here, I ask you? What happiness could we give them in exchange for what they would leave? No, they will not return to us to share our sufferings, but we shall go to them to share their immortality, and thus add still more to their happiness.

The Curé of Ars, in one of his celebrated catechisms, relates a story which is a powerful confirmation of this beautiful doctrine.

A mother had just seen her child die, in the flower of her youth and beauty—her dearly-loved daughter, her only child! Remembering the widow of Naim, she hurried to the neighbouring church and fell on her knees at the feet of Him who is the Master of life and death. She entreats, she weeps, she sobs.... Suddenly, from the depths of the tabernacle she hears a voice, which says: "Go, thy daughter is given back to thee!" Not knowing whether to trust her senses, the unfortunate woman returns in haste to the death-chamber. A miracle! Her child has returned to life! The young girl is seated on a couch, her hands clasped, and her eyes cast down, with every sign of perfect health on

her features. The mother, beside herself with joy, rushes forward, clasps her in her arms, and covers her with kisses. But to her astonishment her child remained silent! A look of deep sadness clouds her face. "My daughter! my daughter!" cries the mother, "do you not recognize me?" "O mother!" replies the angelic child, in a tone of inexpressible sorrow, "what have you done? I was in Heaven! I saw . . . I heard . . . and you have made me return to earth!"

"This young girl," continued the man of God, "could never after that bring herself to take an interest in earthly things. She was often found seated apart with a shade on her brow, her eyes upturned to Heaven. Nothing and no one could comfort her. A few years later she died again, but this time her only malady was home-sickness for Heaven."

This anecdote may be only a parable, but we may say of it that, like the parables in the Gospel, it contains as much truth—and more—as any true story.

By such a doctrine as this, and by such doctrines as these, the Christian Faith consoles us in our mourning, and throw open to us even now new horizons more vast than our sorrow.

CHAPTER II

THE COMPLETION OF THE UNIVERSE

"God has created things in order that they may exist for ever."—ST. AUGUSTINE.

I.

HAVE you ever, even once in your life, gazed on the mighty ocean from the top of a steep and solitary cliff? Or have you stood on a lofty peak and watched the wonderful panorama of mountains and eternal snows unfold itself before your eyes? If so, I say with certainty that the remembrance still lives in your soul, and time will never obliterate it.

"Mountain and sea conjure up the same dreams,
We find the infinite on the height as well as on the strand."

It was indeed the *infinite* which you had there before you. In that boundless distance, behind that limitless horizon, it was the shadow of God that passed before your eyes. For, as the Psalmist tells us, *it is God whom we see in the depths of the sea, it is God whom we admire on the summit of the mountain.** He is so great, so beautiful, that beholding Him for an instant in the night of this world, even under a cloud, like Moses in the moun-

* Ps. xcii.

tain, we can never lose the memory of what we have seen.

But what is the impression of divinity left in our minds by mountain and ocean compared to that conveyed by the *terrifying space* which envelopes us on every side?

"On some beautiful summer evening, on one of those nights when thought loses itself in space, when we are intoxicated with the infinite beauty of the starry firmament spread out before our eyes, who has not yielded to the attraction of those splendid abodes, the mysterious promises held out by those starry regions, the natural home of poetry and dreams? Or, again, on one of those days when the burden of life is heavy, and light itself is darkened, have we never been tempted to seek a refuge in some enchanted pleiad of the skies? We watch by the bedside of a friend, a beloved relation, who is about to die. What will become of the soul when its last reflection fades from the paling forehead, the last glimmer of light from the eyes which are rapidly growing dim? Our heart already follows its departure, its journey, the changing fortunes of this poor soul which carries away with it so much that belongs to us, perhaps the best part of ourselves. We picture for it a wonderful Odyssey; we hope to rejoin it in some island of light; we rejoice with it in this splendid happiness, for which it has ex-

changed the troubled joys and the grievous things of this life. Honestly, who is proof against this supreme consolation which poetry and faith hold out to us, which we fondly hope for, and of which we dream? Our interest in this abyss which separates us from those mysterious regions grows more and more the longer we reflect."*

No soul, whatever its faults, or even its crimes, escapes from this fascination of the infinite, this Divine dream, this attraction to God; for it is He, more than ever, who reveals Himself to our thoughts, and speaks to our souls, behind these mysterious depths of the starry sky.

Many years after his defection from the Church, Luther was sitting on an empty bench at the bottom of his garden at Wittemburg late on a fine summer's evening. Catherine Bora, the nun whom the apostate monk had tempted away from her convent, came presently to join him. The Reformer was silent and gloomy. His thoughts and his gaze were directed to the sky. It was a splendid night. Millions of stars from the depths of the firmament shed torrents of mysterious light on the earth. No doubt the monk who had prevaricated with his conscience was thinking thus to himself: "Those stars, who placed them there? Why did God create those worlds of light?

* Caro, *L'Idée de Dieu.*

What is the purpose of these promises, these drawings of the infinite? Of old I sacrificed everything for the sake of this eternal country: my youth, my family, the world, and of my own free will I buried myself in the austere seclusion of monastic life. Why, then, am I here, in this deserted garden, at the present moment? Why has my heart been ensnared again by the world, its pride, and its sensuality?" These, we cannot doubt, were the thoughts which ebbed backwards and forwards, like the waves of an angry sea, in that guilty soul, for suddenly he was heard to exclaim in a voice broken with tears and anger: "O beautiful Heaven! I shall never behold thee!" The unhappy Catherine Bora, terrified by what she had just heard, rose, and drew near to him. "If we were to go back?" she said in tremulous accents. "No!" answered Luther. "It is useless to think of it." "Why?" "Because," replied the apostate, "the car has travelled too far through the mud." And in order to escape the sight of that Heaven which excited such remorse in his soul, the unfortunate man rose and went to shut himself up in his room!

II.

If a mere glance at the splendours of the firmament is sufficient to arouse such emotions in our soul, what would it be if we

paused in thought and tried to understand the laws which govern it, and to fathom its mysteries ?

Pagan antiquity had only a childish conception of the world we inhabit at present. According to the astronomers of these days the world was the centre of the Universe. The sun and the stars revolved around it.* Of the sun they knew next to nothing; it was a globe of fire, but not very distant from our earth, since its rays of light and heat could reach us. According to the learned it would be " nearly as large as the Peloponnesus," and everyone thought these dimensions prodigious ! As for the stars, they were only looked upon as golden nails. The firmament itself was merely an immense crystal vault to which these brilliant ornaments were attached !

The discovery of the telescope exposed the puerility of ancient astronomy. When the celebrated Herschell first uplifted one of these wonderful instruments towards the sky, multiplying millions of times the power of human vision, he produced a stupefying effect ! Man found himself face to face with the infinite !

The sun, which the ancients had said was only a few square miles, was now discovered to be fourteen hundred thousand times larger

* System of Ptolemy, a Greek astronomer, second century after Jesus Christ.

than the earth! Before long it was established that the distance from the earth of this globe of fire, the rays of which reached us with so much power, was no less than thirty-eight million leagues! As for the stars, the supposed golden nails, they became suns like the one from which we receive our light; planets gravitated round each one of them, shining with their light, deriving life from their heat. If these stars appear to us only like a luminous point, it is because the distance which separates us is prodigious. We know, for instance, that light travels at the rate of seventy thousand leagues a second, which means more than two hundred million leagues an hour. Now, a ray of light starting from the star which is nearest to our earth takes no less than three years to reach us! With regard to the most distant stars, science shows us that their distance is so great that their light can only reach us at the end of ten thousand years.*

Thought is almost annihilated in the presence of such an abyss. What, then, is our earth? An atom lost in immensity, a grain of dust scarcely visible in the infinite!

Yet what we have just said is nothing. Our planetary system, with the millions of stars which we perceive with the help of Herschel's instruments, now greatly perfected, is itself, compared with the entire

* *Cf.* Père Secchi, *Les Étoiles*.

system of the Universe, an imperceptible atom.

When we raise our eyes to the firmament on a fine summer's night we see a long trail of diffused light which extends from one end of the sky to the other: it is the *Milky Way*. These luminous streaks are formed by a collection of suns too far from the earth for their rays to reach us, except as a phosphorescence which is barely visible. Astronomers, with the help of their instruments, have calculated the number of these suns; they have counted no less than eighteen millions.

Yet this *Milky Way* seems only a narrow path across the fields of the Infinite. If we were permitted to follow this path, we should see over our heads and under our feet, on our right and on our left, other suns, to be counted by hundreds of millions. But beyond the power of thought to compass, we see through this mass of stars, in immeasurable depths of distance, a luminous golden dust; these are new worlds, in such profusion that they can never be counted—vindicating God's challenge to the great Patriarch of Chaldæa: *Number the stars, if thou canst**—and situated at such distances from each other that the human mind can find no term or number or comparison to give even the most feeble idea of it!

* Gen. xv.

What a commentary Science thus affords on these verses of the Bible: *The Heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands. Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night showeth knowledge.**

The greatest of all astronomers, Newton, his genius fascinated by these unsounded depths, was so dazzled by their splendour, that towards the end of his life he could never hear the name of God pronounced, even in familiar conversation, without baring his head.

It was reserved for our own times to see men arise and wage war against God, against the Master of the Universe, whose thought alone, *playing*,† created such depths, and filled them with such marvels.

One of these men, speaking quite recently from the most important tribune in the land, delivered himself of this unheard-of blasphemy: "If God were to appear Himself visibly before the multitudes, the first duty of man would be to treat with Him as an equal with whom one discusses, and not as a Master to whom one submits."

It appears that he found listeners who ventured to applaud this criminal insanity! Poor fools! God does not need to *appear visibly* against you. He has only to leave you to yourselves. In a few days His inevitable

* Ps. xviii. 1, 2. † Prov. viii. 30.

laws will have laid you in the grave, where a few little worms will "sup off your mighty brain", and there is an end of you for ever!

III.

With all its present splendour, the Universe is not yet completed. The great work of Creation will only attain perfection when the *Seventh Day* is accomplished. The six days which Moses speaks of in Genesis were periods, each of which may have lasted thousands of centuries. God was then preparing a temporal abode for man: *the Earth.* The Bible says: on the *Seventh Day* God rested. That is true, for He no longer operates directly; He leaves the laws which He Himself laid down to operate their own evolutions. These evolutions have a more sublime end than that of the first six days; by them God prepares for His loving and beloved creatures an eternal abode: *Heaven.* "Nothing moves for the sake of moving," said St. Thomas, "but in order to arrive." St. Peter wrote: *There will be one day, new heavens and a new earth.* The great Apostle (Paul) is plainer still: *For every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain even till now ... waiting for the adoption of the sons of God.*

Let us listen to Bossuet, whose genius has collected together on one page all that the

Scriptures, Tradition, and Theology have to tell us on this great subject:

"The eternal repose of the Blessed was figured to us from the beginning of the world, when God, having drawn His creatures out of nothing, and disposed them in such an admirable order during six days, proceeded to establish and sanctify the day of rest, in which, as Holy Scripture says, 'He rested from all His work.' You know well, Christians, that God, to whom nothing is difficult, does not need relaxation from His work, and you also know that, having consecrated this day of rest, He has not ceased since then to act incessantly. *My Father*, said the Son of God, *worketh even unto now*, and if He ceased for a moment to sustain the whole Universe by the might of His power, the sun would stray from its course, the sea would burst its bounds, the earth would totter on its axis—in short, all nature, in one moment, would not return to its original chaos, but be totally lost and cease to exist. When, therefore, it pleased God to sanctify the seventh day, and to constitute it His day of rest, He wished to make us understand that after the continual action by which He developed the whole order of the ages, He had appointed a last day, in which He would rest with His elect. This is the mysterious Sabbath, this is *the day of rest which is reserved for God's people*, according to the doctrine of the Apostle:

Itaque relinquitur sabbatissimus populo Dei in the learned Epistle to the Hebrews."*

The impious minds of bygone days were moved to mocking ridicule at the idea of a *last day* for the world we inhabit. But in our own time Science, most estranged from revealed truth, and even hostile to it, foretells this *supreme catastrophe* in terms almost identical with those used by Christ Himself nearly two thousand years ago, when speaking of it to His Apostles.

We wish the reader to judge for himself.

The Gospel.	Science.
"Men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon them. For the powers of heaven shall be moved." (St. Luke xxi. 26.	"The ultimate manifestation of terrestrial life will be destroyed. The cold and naked globe will carry its indifference along the barren ways of space.
"The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light; the stars shall fall from heaven." (St. Matt. xxiv. 29.	"The extinguished sun, followed by its funereal train, will continue its headlong flight through the night towards the infinite." (*La Melée Sociale :* Preface).

We should like an answer to this: If He was not the Son of God, who, then, was this man of Palestine who, nineteen centuries before our scientists were born, sat on the slope of the Mount of Olives, teaching the

* Bossuet, Sermon for All Saints.

laws and destinies of the Universe to twelve poor boatmen ?

It is very evident, indeed, that this Universe which dazzles us with its splendour, and makes us giddy with its immensity, is only a palace in process of construction. The suns, the stars, the innumerable worlds which we see with our eyes, or suspect through our calculations, are only the materials which are being used for the eternal dwelling which God is preparing in order to receive His Elect, and which He will inhabit with them.

Modern astronomy estimates at no less than one hundred and forty millions the number of stars—that is to say, centres of celestial worlds—and besides these worlds which actually exist, it shows us two hundred thousand nebulæ, which are nothing else than worlds in course of formation.

"Source of all our blessings," cried St. Augustine, commenting on God's rest on the seventh day, "give us Thy peace, a peace which cannot decay. For this admirable and beautiful harmony of so many excellent creatures *will pass away on the day when their end is accomplished.* They will have their evening as they have had their morning."*

But this is such a great truth, and it opens out already such vast horizons to our mental vision of the eternal world, that we wish to enlarge on it, and that is what we shall do in the two next chapters.

* *Confessions*, book xiii., chap. xxxv.

CHAPTER III

THE PRINCIPLES OF SCIENCE

"The earth in its perpetual revolution is seeking, perhaps, the place of its eternal repose."—RITTER.

I.

LET us never turn our backs on Science: for God made it, and in the Holy Scriptures He is pleased to call Himself the *Master of Science; Deus scientiarum Dominus est.*

The different sciences, indeed, even when they remain purely natural, are so many avenues which end in, or rather which rise to, the only centre: "Truth." Now, Truth is God.

A celebrated composer of the last century said: "My art is my prayer." And every scientist may truly say: "My science is the road which leads me to God."

Does not this give a deep meaning to the phrase so often quoted: "A little learning takes us away from God; a great deal brings us back to Him"?*

But of all the sciences none leads so directly to God as Astronomy.

We are told that Linnæus, the well-known naturalist, was one day studying a simple

* Bacon.

leaf of a tree through a microscope. At the sight of its wonderful texture, the nerves which sustain the whole, the vessels through which the sap, the life-blood of the plant, circulates, the stomata or little mouths through which it breathes, the great naturalist was overcome with awe. The microscope dropped from his grasp, his knees bent under him, and he remained for a moment lost in contemplation. Afterwards he said: "I have seen God passing, and, like Moses, under a cloud; I saw Him, and I remained silent, struck with admiration and wonder. In the works of the Creator I discovered the traces of His footsteps. What power! What wisdom! What unimaginable perfection in the smallest and most insignificant of these works!"

If the scientist who bends over a blade of grass is so struck with wonder, what of him whose genius rises to the contemplation of the heavenly spheres? There power, wisdom, and perfection attain to even greater heights, since the objects which contain them seem infinite. The Lawgiver of Astronomy* as he has been called, wrote the following ecstatic page on this subject:

"Eight days ago I saw the first ray of light; three days ago I saw daylight; now at last comes the full blaze of sunlight, the most admirable contemplation. There is nothing

* Kepler.

to hold me back; I surrender to my own enthusiasm. I am ready to challenge mankind with the frank confession that I have stolen the golden vessels of the Egyptians in order to build a tabernacle for my God far away from idolatrous Egypt. If men pardon me for this, I shall rejoice; but if they are irritated against me, I am resigned. The die is cast, I shall write my book. Whether it is read now or in a future age matters little to me. It can afford to wait for a reader. Did not God wait six thousand years before giving Himself someone to contemplate His works ?"

II.

In short, the great astronomer had just perceived that our world is only a grain of dust in comparison with the immensity of the Universe. Until then—that is to say, until the beginning of the seventeenth century—Astronomy might be said not to exist. The Middle Ages had not advanced beyond the notions of Antiquity. According to astronomers, the Universe consisted of twelve spheres fitting into each other, with the earth as a centre. The truth had just dawned on Kepler. By the sole power of his genius he had divined the immensity of the Creator's work. The marvellous laws which govern Creation had been made manifest to him; and his soul was dazzled and

confounded in the presence of such power, such greatness, and such beauty.

During the last three centuries Kepler's ideas have been confirmed by the most wonderful discoveries. *The book* which he wrote, *surrendering to his own enthusiasm*, has been read, understood, and left behind. The Universe which he suspected of being immense we now know to be, in a measure, infinite; the calculations which filled him with ecstasy now seem to us almost trivial, being so far below the truth. Not only is the earth no more than a grain of dust, but our entire solar system—that is to say, the whole visible world; for in comparison with the incommensurable extent of the Universe which envelopes it, it is only an atom.

Read the following lines from one of the elementary primers which are put into the hands of the young people in our schools:

"Eminent astronomers believe that our sun, with its train of planets and comets, is in the midst of a first spherical agglomeration composed of the brilliant stars in the firmament, and is itself one of its elements; that this globular mass is surrounded at a considerable distance by an immense zone consisting of several millions of stars which compose the Milky Way; and that each nebula is an immense milky way, quite as rich in stars, and quite as extensive as our own, and which from our external point of view ap-

pears like a ring, the apparent diameter of which depends on the distance which separates us from it.

" We know the dimensions of our planetary system: they exceed a thousand millions of leagues. These dimensions are a mere nothing compared to the distance of our sun from the stars which we see with the naked eye. These distances, in their turn, are imperceptible compared to the diameter of the Milky Way, and this same diameter is infinitely small beside the distances which separate the nebulæ from one another, and our own distance from each one of them.

" It takes more than three years for the light emanating from the nearest star to reach our eyes; it would take several centuries for it to cross the Milky Way; it would take it, no doubt, thousands of years to go from one nebula to another. So that, to use Arago's expression, these rays of light, these rapid messengers, only bring us the very ancient history of these distant worlds."*

This last line, in order to be understood by all, requires some explanation. All know that the ray of light which starts from an object carries with it the image of that object as it was at the moment when the ray left it. Thus the ray of light which started from our earth six thousand years ago bears with it to the worlds it reaches at

* Garcet, *Cosmography*.

this moment the sight of Adam and Eve awaking to life in Paradise from the hand of God! The ray which will bring them the vision of the Son of God dying on Calvary to save the unhappy children of Adam and Eve will only reach them in four thousand years. Who would venture to say that these worlds are not inhabited by beings perfect enough to see what is contained in this ray? In any case, God, who is present in these worlds as He is present everywhere, sees it. This gives us an idea of that truth which the Christian religion lays down as a dogma, that for God there is neither past nor future, but that all the events which have happened, or will happen, in time are always present to His vision.

We conclude this rapid view, which is enough to make one giddy, of the immensity of Creation with a few lines from a writer as much respected in the world of science as he is loved by believers in the Gospel.

"When we estimate the stellary distances by indirect means, and express them by a relative modulus, we find that placing the nearest stars at the least possible distance, they would still be at such a distance that their light would take three years and three months to reach us. This figure must be increased tenfold in the case of all the neighbouring stars.

"The orbit which the earth describes

round the sun comprises *two hundred and ninety-six million kilometres*, yet appears from there only an imperceptible point. Many of the planetary nebulæ considerably exceed the dimensions of this orbit by their bulk. Their light cannot take less than *ten thousand years* to reach us!

"But however immense this space may be, it does not constitute the real limit of Creation, because Herschel's instruments did not penetrate to the depths of the milky way, and those we use now, though far stronger, do not penetrate to them either; it is therefore impossible for us to fathom the firmament. One cannot say that it is infinite, for a thing composed of distinct and disconnected objects can never be infinite. But although not absolutely infinite, it is practically so as far as we are concerned."*

III.

What is the nature, the matter, the constitution of these worlds? Does life exist in them? Are they inhabited? These are questions in which our mind is keenly interested. Since Science tore a little of the veil which envelopes us, we have seen too much through the rent not to dream of what is still hidden from our gaze. We feel cramped on the earth now that we have

* Père Zecchi, of the Society of Jesus.

been given a glimpse of *Heaven*. Imagine an Alpine eagle, born and bred in an immense aviary. One day he sees the mountain peaks through the bars of his prison: he recognizes his native land! It is the end of his peace! From that moment he is crushed by the narrowness of his surroundings; his wings are continually wounded by the walls of his prison which hinder his flight through the plains of the air; he wishes to go and live on those summits; it was for them he was born. This is a true figure of the human soul, and each one of us may repeat, not without sadness, the words of the poet:

"Man is a fallen god who remembers heaven!"*

Whatever we may do, there are certain hours which recur more frequently as the years pass over us, and we see the world as it really is, when our eyes turn to the invisible heights, and our thoughts to the world beyond.

Science, at the present time, can answer as follows all questions as to the nature of the celestial worlds: "The matter of which these incomprehensible masses is composed is always the same. The elements which the chemist studies in his laboratory are the same as those which the spectroscope reveals to us as existing in the most recent nebulæ

* Lamartine.

and in the stellar atmosphere. Although only a small number of them have been identified, it is sufficient to make us sure that the laws which govern matter are the same everywhere; the discoveries which are made every day confirm this idea.

"But Creation, as seen by the astronomer, is not a simple mass of incandescent matter: it is a powerful organism in which, when incandescence ceases, life begins. Although this life is not perceptible to our telescopes, yet by analogy with our own globe we may conclude that it also exists in the others. The atmospheric conditions of other planets, which in some respects are so similar to those of our sun, lead us to believe that these bodies are at the same stage as that of our own system, or that they are passing through one of those periods which we have already traversed, or will traverse some day.

"We may draw some conclusions from the immense variety of the creatures which have already existed, or still exist on our planet, as to the diversity of those which exist in the others! If with us air, land, and water are inhabited by such a variety of living creatures, which are modified by the simple facts of climate and surroundings, how many more there must be in those systems where the secondary stars receive their light, not from one, but from several suns alternately."*

* Père Zecchi.

In another of his writings the eminent Religious pens these lines in which we find an exquisite mingling of the highest science with the deepest piety:

"What must we think of those stars which are, no doubt, like our sun, centres of light, heat, and activity, destined, like it, to sustain the life of a multitude of creatures of every kind and species? It seems to us absurd to look upon these vast regions as uninhabited deserts; they must be peopled with intelligent and reasonable beings, capable of knowing, honouring, and loving their Creator. Perhaps these inhabitants of the stars are more faithful than ourselves to the duty of gratitude towards Him who drew them out of nothingness; we hope that amongst them there are none of those unfortunate beings who take pride in denying the existence and intelligence of Him to whom they owe their own life and the faculty of knowing so many wonders."*

IV.

But what confounds our imagination, yet fills it with delight, is the fact that these millions of worlds—we should, no doubt, say hundreds of millions—instead of remaining stationary in the depths of the sky, as they appear to us, journey through space

* Père Zecchi, *Le Soleil.*

with a giddy velocity. They resemble a countless fleet navigating in an ocean without shores. Each vessel, preceded or followed by ships like itself, carries out its evolutions round a superior ship, which in its turn obeys the orders of the flag-ship. But this fleet never returns to the same quarter. Neither does it revolve on itself; but with stupefying precision, and a rapidity which defies all calculation, it seems to advance towards a mysterious harbour situated in infinite depths!

Before such depths as these Astronomy itself is silent and aghast; and if it must speak, can only borrow the words of the poet, which are almost a prayer:

"O suns, wandering worlds that voyage with us,
Tell us, if He has told you, whither we are all bound.
Shall we strike a reef in the darkness of night
On the borders of silence, and mourning and death,
And sow with our wreckage immensity?
Or led by His hand to a brilliant shore
In a harbour of heaven cast anchor while yet
Asleep, and remain there in surety for ever?"

Confronted with the marvels of God's almighty power, poor human science has nothing left to say. But the Christian religion has in store for us sublime answers which await us in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE TEACHINGS OF FAITH

"But we look for new heavens, in which justice dwelleth."—ST. PETER.

I.

A WRITER of our own day has dared to publish these lines:

"According to the cosmogony of Moses, the earth is the whole Universe. All religions are founded on this base, which is profoundly false, and we may add that they rest on it still."*

If this declaration is made in good faith, it does little honour to the learning of the author. It makes one think that he cannot even have glanced carelessly at the Mosaic cosmogony of which he speaks. Otherwise in the very first chapter of Moses' book, and the first line of the chapter, he would have read these words: *In the beginning God created heaven and earth,* and he would have understood at once that in the mind of the author of Genesis Heaven and earth are two things which are absolutely distinct, since he announces their creation in a phrase which we might render thus, with entire exactitude: *In the beginning God created heaven, then he created earth.*

* L. Figuier.

Would he have dared to bring such an accusation if he had read these verses, which yet are so well known, in the book of Job ?

Then the Lord answered Job out of a whirlwind, and said :

" Gird up thy loins like a man. . . .

" Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth. . . .

*" When the morning stars praised Me together, and all the sons of God made a joyful melody ?" . . .**

We ask the fair-minded reader : If, according to our religion, " the earth was the whole Universe," where could we *have placed these sons of God who applauded at the birth of our world ?*

This is what unbelieving Science often does: *it blasphemes what it ignores !*

This pretended scientist had not read the New Testament either.

Let us listen to Jesus Christ, when He speaks of Heaven to His Apostles, in His admirable discourse after the Last Supper:

Whither I go you cannot come. . . . In my Father's house there are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I shall go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to Myself, that where I am you also may be.†

If in the minds of believers " *the earth was*

* Job xxxviii. † St. John xiii. and xiv.

the whole Universe," as the author we have just quoted pretended, where could we place the Heavens from which the Son of God descended on the day of His Incarnation: *descendit de cœlis,** to which He rose again on the day of His Ascension: *ascendit in cœlum,*† and where He is seated now on a throne of glory at the right hand of His Father: *sedet ad dexteram Patris?*‡ Where, finally, would be those *many mansions* which He prepares for the millions, and, in the course of centuries, the thousands of millions of human beings who will have merited a place in His eternal kingdom because they have believed in His word and obeyed His laws?

Not only is there one Heaven, according to Scripture, distinct from the world we live in, but there are several, since St. Paul tells us that he was rapt in ecstasy, even to the *third heaven.*

St. Peter also says: *When the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with the burning heat, we look for new heavens and a new earth . . . in which justice dwelleth.*

II.

Supported by these teachings of Holy Scripture, and by many others which would take too long to quote, Catholic Theology has free scope for its opinions. However

* Nicene Creed. † *Ibid.* ‡ *Ibid.*

high and however far contemporary science may go, the Christian can follow, if indeed he has not gone before. The writings of the Fathers bear witness to it.

Origen, at the beginning of the third century, speaking of the death of Christ, said: "The altar was on Calvary, but the blood of the Victim bathed the *Universe*."

Already in the fifth century St. John Chrysostom wrote to a young widow: "Try to live so that you may one day be in the same heavenly world as your husband."

But why should we continue to bring fresh testimony to establish a truth which no honest-minded person can doubt? Rather let us content ourselves with quoting a page in which a celebrated historian of the last century has given us an admirable summary of the question:

"It is possible that God may have peopled other planets besides our own with intelligent creatures to know Him, love Him, serve Him, and possess Him eternally, as well as ourselves. It is possible that we may be the lowest order of created intellects. It is perhaps for that reason that the Son of God, wishing to humble himself as much as possible, came down upon earth, became man, not angel, not a superhuman creature. The blood of the Cross, shed here below, may have profited those above us as well as ourselves.

The Apostle of the Gentiles, on his return from the third Heaven, seems to imply this. He lays weight twice on the thought that as in the Son all things were created, both that which is in Heaven and that which is on earth, it pleased the Father to restore all things in Him, to reconcile all, and bring peace to all by His Blood: both that which is on earth and that which is in Heaven.''*

Thus Father Felix could exclaim with a noble pride, addressing those writers who attack our dogmas in the name of the discoveries of astronomy:

"You seek to find in those stars and suns your peers in intelligence and liberty, and you desire to salute from a distance across space their astronomical societies and civilization. So be it. If you have no other reason for breaking with us, there is nothing to prevent us from holding out our hands to one another."

III.

How, on the contrary, is it possible not to perceive that all these discoveries are a triumph for our Christian creed?

"I shall never forget," wrote a writer whom we like to quote on this subject, "how in my childhood I used to hear men of mature age, learned men as I thought them, ridicule the Master of mankind on account of these

* Rohrbacher, *Universal History of the Church.*

words: 'Do you see,' they said, 'the stars falling from Heaven on to the earth like hailstones! . . . The Son of Man is not aware that the stars are suns.' And these learned men, who knew so well that the stars are suns, were also under the impression that our earth was the only centre of attraction. But where in the Gospel is it said that the stars will fall on the earth?

"Such is the science which shakes the faith of our children!

"A few years ago a great and indefatigable lover of science constructed an instrument even more wonderful than Herschell's. A spectacle that thought would not have dared to conceive was instantly opened out to man in different parts of the sky. He saw groups of stars—that is to say, groups of suns—assembled in millions. These groups had a kernel, a centre, incomparably more brilliant than the rest. This centre possessed an incalculable power of attraction. All the suns revolved around it in lines and trails. But how do they revolve round this common centre of gravity? They revolve by going towards it. Their orbits are not circles, nor ellipses, but spirals. These spirals end in the centre. We see them described in the sky by great trails of suns, which follow each other like men on the march. The lines of the celestial army spread out in every direction, but all converge and arrive at the centre.

The foremost ones in each line are already in the centre; others touch it, others approach it, while others are still far away. It is like a great army entering the capital for a festival. The town is full of soldiers, while others are still arriving, and their immense lines are to be seen far out in the country. But there is this difference, that these are not mere soldiers, but kings, each of which governs twenty worlds; and each of these kings advances escorted by all his kingdoms. The mind and the senses reel. Millions of empires, millions of worlds unite, to become one for ever!"*

It was, no doubt, after reading this page that M. Caro wrote, in his fine book on the *Idea of God:* "Father Gratry has written pages that make us feel the thrill of the infinite."

IV.

The supreme law for all creatures is to tend to perfection. This law may meet with obstacles in the case of creatures endowed with free will, such as Angels and men, but in the case of purely material creatures it cannot fail to be fulfilled. Consider the stars in their evolutions across space; they have to traverse incommensurable distances with inconceivable rapidity; but not one of them is ever behind its time, even a quarter

* Père Gratry, *Connaissance de l'Âme*, vol. ii.

of a second! Yet most of them have been coming to the meeting-place for thousands of years, and thousands of millions of miles!

A learned professor of the Sorbonne* established this truth a few years ago when he was addressing his pupils at the end of a course on astronomy: "On such a day, gentlemen, at such an hour, at such a second, three great stars from the centre of the heavens will obey, not our prediction, but God's command. It is only men who are refractory."

If you ask Theology where the Universe is going to, the answer is easy: "Nothing moves for the sake of moving, but in order to arrive."† The world we inhabit and all the other worlds in existence are marching towards their completion—that is to say, their full perfection. Among these worlds there may be perhaps some which have already reached the goal. We are ready to believe it when we read such a page as this one:

"In the depths of the firmament we often see two suns, sometimes three or more, in each other's company, like brothers. We see others marching together in crowds, in serried ranks, like armies.

"The light never wanes in the midst of these choirs of stars. The glow of their united dawn, a thousand and a thousand

* Arago. † St. Thomas.

times repeated, maintains an eternal day in these assemblages of suns."*

But Catholic Theology has already spoken to us of this eternal day, and the Church, at the foot of her altars, bids us sigh for its dawn:

" Oh ! when will the day dawn
Which knows no setting !"

(" O quando lucescet tuus
Qui nescit occasum, Dies !")

Were not these the worlds which the great monk of the thirteenth century beheld in vision, when he exclaimed, carried out of himself: " O most happy mansion of the city above ! O most bright day of eternity which knows no night, but is always enlightened by the Sovereign Truth; a day always joyful, always secure, and never changing its state for the contrary ! Oh ! that this day would shine upon us, and all those temporal things come to an end ! It shines, indeed, upon the saints, resplendent with everlasting brightness, but to us pilgrims upon earth it is seen only afar off and through a glass."†

Yes, for us who believe in the Gospel, it is more than a hope, it is a dogma; there exists already in the mysterious depths of the Universe a transfigured world which is

* Schubert, *Das Melgebaüde*, § vi.
† *Imitation*, book iii., chap. xiviii.

the abode of Christ and His Elect. This is the dogma which the Church brought back from the mountain of the Ascension, and from that time she continually discourses on it to her children. Hear what the greatest of her doctors, St. Augustine, declares in the first centuries of the Christian era:

"Do not doubt that Jesus Christ as man is now in the place from whence He will come again. Do not forget, and retain faithfully what the Christian Faith teaches us, that Christ is risen from the dead, that He has ascended to Heaven, that He is seated at the right hand of the Father, from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. According to the testimony of the two Angels, He will come again in the same manner as He was seen ascending to Heaven—that is to say, in the same form, and with the same body, to which He has given immortality without in any way changing its nature."*

The extension of the horizon to embrace the immensity of the Universe seemed a snare laid by unbelieving Science to shake my faith, but, on the contrary, it is strengthened, made glad, and moved to enthusiasm. The Gospel taught me that the God-Man had gone to prepare for me an immortal dwelling: my reason assured that this dwell-

* St. Augustine, Letter clxxxvii.

ing must not only be worthy of me, surpassing all my earthly dreams in beauty and greatness, but that it must, above all, be worthy of God—that is to say, that as nearly as the created can approach the uncreated, it must approach infinite beauty and infinite greatness.

If scientists tell me that the earth which is now my abode is only an atom in immeasurable space, I can believe them without any difficulty, for I know already that *we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come.**

If they show me that this world which is now my Universe is being hurried away in the wake of other worlds which are infinitely more powerful, and which will one day absorb it, I listen with pleasure, for my Sacred Books have already told me this, and I was convinced of its truth. This little earthly Universe is only a tent set up for the passage of the Elect; and one day, when the great human caravan has finished its passage from time to eternity, God will fold this tent as men do in the desert when the last traveller has gone.

If it be proved to me that the whole Universe is a sphere, the radius of which defies human figures as its circumference baffles calculation, that does not surprise me, for God is an infinite geometrician—*He thinks,*

* St. Paul to the Hebrews xiii. 14.

and the world is made. His works therefore must resemble His thoughts.

But, above all, let them tell me of the splendours of those distant regions which derive their light from suns impossible to count; repeat to me the harmonies of those choirs of stars marching like armies; describe to me, if you will, those collections of stars on which the glow of a thousand thousand dawns sheds the light of an eternal day: my soul leaps with a divine enthusiasm. For I recognize then the regions of which the great Apostle of Christ, my master, had a glimpse in passing, but of which he was powerless to tell us more than that *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived,* what *God has prepared for His elect.*

When I reflect that those dear ones who have left me, and have disappeared, enveloped in death's mystery, are living there now, that these are the regions they inhabit, the wonders they contemplate, the harmonies they listen to, the pure delights which intoxicate them, and that I myself soon, to-morrow perhaps, if I know how to and wish to merit it, will go and rejoin them, to enjoy those wonderful sights, to hear those harmonious sounds, to drink at those torrents of happiness! When I tell myself that a day will come when God, having com-

pleted the work of Creation, will bid us resume our bodies, in order that we may contemplate together and for ever still greater marvels, enjoy a still higher happiness—then, scientists, my faith appears to me incomparably greater than your Science ! Your books fall from my hands, my eyes fill with involuntary tears, my knees bend under me, my whole being is lost in astonishment and love before a God so great in His works, and who prepares such magnificent rewards for those who know Him, serve Him, and adore Him !

BOOK IV

HUMAN LIFE: AFTER THE GENERAL RESURRECTION

CHAPTER I.—THE DOGMA OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY.

" II.—THE WORLD OF THE ELECT.

" III.—THE ELECT.

" IV.—THE GOD-MAN.

CHAPTER I

THE DOGMA OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

"Our body is sown in corruption, it shall rise again in incorruption."—ST. PAUL.

I.

PAUL being come to Athens . . . certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics disputed with him, and some said: "What is it that this word sower would say? . . . And taking him they brought him to Areopagus. . . . Standing in the midst of Areopagus, Paul said . . . Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious. For passing by . . . I found an altar on which was written:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

What, therefore, you worship, without knowing it, that I preach to you. God who made the world and all things therein . . . dwelleth not in temples made with hands. . . . In Him we live and move and be. . . . He hath appointed a day wherein He will judge the world in equity, by the Man whom He hath appointed . . . raising Him from the dead."

And when they (the Athenians) had heard

*of the resurrection of the dead, some indeed mocked; but others said: "We will hear thee again concerning this matter."**

This dogma of the Resurrection of the dead still remains for us what it was from the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel: a perplexing mystery.

Yet let us endeavour to show that if it is beyond the grasp of human reason, it cannot be said that it is beyond the possibility of Divine power.

II.

To begin with, if God was able to create the body of man for the first time, why should He not be able to *re-create* it?

We may be answered: *The organic matter of which this body was composed has been dissolved and dispersed.* That is true; but the elements which compose this matter still subsist; their form changes, but they are not destroyed. For not an atom is lost in nature any more than a star is lost in the firmament. Why, then, should these dispersed atoms not resume their place and reconstitute the human body at the voice of God? Besides, these atoms are much more numerous than is needful for the purpose. Science teaches that a man's body is entirely renewed in the space of seven years. A young man who dies at twenty has already had his blood,

* Acts of the Apostles xvii.

his bones, and his flesh renewed three times. He does not retain one of the material atoms of which his body was composed at his birth. What, then, of the man who lives sixty, eighty years?

But we hasten to say that we have no need of this theory in order to explain the dogma of the Resurrection.

These atoms were not us. The unanswerable proof is that we might have changed them ten times over, and more, in the course of our life, without changing ourselves. *The flesh is nothing*, said the Master of all truth; *it is the spirit which giveth life.*

A possible explanation of the dogma we are studying is this: On leaving this world the *spirit*, to use the language of the Gospel, takes away with it *life*, that mysterious force by which it first took to itself a body in our mother's womb. When, then, it redescends on the earth on the last day, this same force will enable it to reconstitute the body from which it was violently separated by death.

Therefore the Resurrection would not be a question of *particles*, but of *forces*. Death dispersed the *particles* to the winds of heaven, but the soul took away the *forces* with itself to the eternal world.

This is not a mere supposition; it is a truth confirmed every day by the discoveries of Science.

Here are two examples amongst a thousand:

A few years ago some grains of wheat were found in an Egyptian hypogeum, having lain there for forty centuries. Someone thought of sowing them. What was the general stupefaction when, at the end of a few weeks, germs were seen uplifting the earth. Life had slept in these little grains for thousands of years; losing nothing of itself, since now it was seen to produce first a germ, then roots, soon afterwards a stalk, an ear, and corn!

The second example is still more wonderful. About the middle of the last century some workmen were sinking a well close to the town of Blois. One of them broke a flint in two pieces with his pickaxe. There was a cavity in this flint, and out of this cavity came a living toad, which immediately began to jump about. The workman seized it and replaced it in the hollow of the stone. He lived there for months without eating anything. How did this toad come to be shut up inside the flint?* The only possible explanation is this: In prehistoric times he must have been rolled up in the mud and buried at this depth by an upheaval of the soil. It takes twenty thousand, forty thou-

* This toad was presented to the Academy of Science in Paris on July 21, 1851, and the whole of this account was verified by a commission of learned men, who pronounced it to be absolutely certain.

sand years—more, perhaps—to change mud into flint ! . . . .

Oh, how true it is that we know nothing ! and, therefore, that it would become us to be modest !

Shall a seed of grass, a wretched reptile, thus retain life for an indefinite period, and shall this be denied to the human soul, the highest work of God ?

III.

The dogma of the Resurrection of the body is not only possible; we venture to assert that it is necessary.

The following page is an eloquent demonstration of this assertion.

" I own," wrote Father Gratry, " that when in my youth I beheld death, when I saw those I loved come to an end and disappear . . . when I saw men divided more by their evil deeds than by time and space . . . when I felt that the life of my soul was so narrow and incomplete, while its emotions succeeded each other so rapidly as it rushed so swiftly towards the end; in the face of this incorrigible mobility, this alarming confusion of ideas, I was seized with terror. For a long time I only imagined the world to come as a void, and immortality as a shadow of our present life. The intolerable emptiness of a Heaven and an eternity without

any visible body or world, seemed to me only a cold copy, an abstract memory of our life in this world, which, though transitory, was at least sensible to touch and feeling. When did my heart and my faith, my imagination and my reason, first find some rest and some hope? On the day when it was given to me to meditate on the spectacle of the heavens unrolled before my eyes, to study the moving life of the heavenly fleets and pleiads by the light of those words of eternal life which Thou didst bring us, O my God! The day when my eyes were opened to the meaning of Holy Scripture, of that wonderful Epistle of St. Paul to the dispersed people of God, the whole of which meaning is contained in the two words of the Divine text: '*Mobilium translationem*, The end of mobility.' This meaning is only a beginning of those words which came from Thy mouth: 'I go to prepare a place for you!' It was necessary, indeed, that these words should be said, for there is no other consolation. When I see men passing away like a flowing river, and all the worlds like ships sailing by at full speed, when I feel that I am passing away myself, I need some end to hope for, a land, a permanent dwelling, a country, a city of peace."*

We venture to say it: The Resurrection of the body is not only felt to be true and ar-

* *De la Connaissance de l'Âme*, vol. ii.

dently desired by our heart, but, if we take the trouble to reflect, we shall see that reason itself demands it.

We saw in a previous chapter that the supreme law of the creature was to tend to perfection. Creation as a whole, in its evolutions through space, seeks its ultimate end, and all destruction is in reality a transformation. Shall man alone, the creature of God's predilection, remain outside this supreme law, and miss the end for which he was created ?

For man is not a spirit imprisoned in a body like a culprit in a dungeon. To use Bossuet's fine expression, he is a *natural whole*. In order to be complete he needs a perfect soul in a perfect body. We cannot say that the human soul deprived of its body is in a state of suffering, but we assert, supported by Catholic Theology, that its state is one of real imperfection. That is why Christ Jesus did not wish His human soul to enter Heaven until it had taken back its flesh from the grave. Therefore, also, the Virgin Mary, His Mother, anticipating the marvellous promises of the general Resurrection, has gone to rejoin her Son both in body and soul in the place where His glorious life is spent.

How could God allow His Elect to remain for ever in an imperfect state when it was on their account that the whole of Creation was

originally drawn from nothingness, and led on to its ultimate end through succeeding ages? "For," says Bossuet, "elements and causes only continue to subsist because God has enveloped His Elect in their order . . . and they are the end of all the designs of His Providence."*

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, wrote the great Apostle to the faithful at Corinth, *the dead shall rise again . . . for this mortal must put on immortality . . . then shall come to pass this saying which is written: O death, where is thy victory?*† These words give us clearly to understand that the general Resurrection is also the necessary crowning of the Incarnation of the Son of God, a mystery greater and more beautiful than that of Creation!

Would the Son of God have truly repaired the disasters caused by sin if man's body was to be abandoned for eternity to the grave's corruption? Could He with truth, on the day of His eternal triumph, challenge Death —that is to say, Satan—with the question: *O Death, where is thy victory?*

Could not Satan answer: "I had conquered the whole man by sin. Thou hast retaken his soul from me, but I keep his body. There is my victory!"

* Sermon on the Happiness of the Saints.

† First Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xv.

Therefore the general Resurrection is a necessary consequence of the two greatest mysteries in our own world and in all other worlds: the Creation and the Incarnation.

IV.

The dogma of the Resurrection of the body is not only possible and necessary, but full of Divine beauty.

The soul has prayed, fought, and lived in order to merit Heaven; but has not the body also suffered? *I chastise my body*, said the Apostle St. Paul, *and bring it into subjection.* Every Christian can say the same. What privations, what fasts, what penances, what hard labour, what sacrifices of every kind the true believer imposes on himself from the age of reason to the hour of death in order to vanquish his evil inclinations, and remain faithful to the moral law! It is for this reason that the Christian religion treats our body with a veneration which is almost worship. It is purified by the waters of Baptism, sanctified by the Sacraments, rendered almost Divine by its participation in the Holy Eucharist, when the Blood of a God becomes our blood, and His Flesh our flesh.

Even when the body is bereft of the soul, the Church awards it an honour which would appear extraordinary to us if we were not accustomed to behold this pomp and cere-

mony from our childhood. She brings this mortal body, so soon to become a little dust, beneath the vaulted roofs of her temples; she sprinkles it with holy water; she burns incense round it. She even mounts the steps of the altar to offer up the great Sacrifice on its behalf, so that some drops of the Divine Blood may fall on this trophy of death, and mark it with the seal of immortality. Then she bears it away triumphantly to its last resting-place. Before putting it away, she blesses and incenses and consecrates by her prayers the earth in which it is to be laid to rest. This earth will always be holy in her eyes. Perhaps at this moment there are many who weep beside this tomb in which lie buried for them all their poor hopes of human happiness. But soon, perhaps, they will forget. Alas! time sometimes obliterates these memories in our hearts quicker than the wind and rain wear away the inscriptions which we engraved in our sorrow on the tombstone! But the Church never forgets! She knows that this *human dust* which she entrusts to the earth is *holy*, twice holy, since God *fashioned it with His own hands* on the day of Creation, and, which is incomparably greater, on the day of His Incarnation, assumed it like a royal mantle, to veil His Divinity. She will often come back to kneel on this holy ground, to pray for those who sleep there, beneath

the shadow of the eternal Cross. She will come back until that day, the last day of time and the first of eternity, when her prayer for the dead will cease, because there will be no more dead to pray for. That is the day on which her Lord Jesus spoke to her: *The day shall come when they that are in their graves shall hear the voice of their God, and shall live!*

It is true that all religions have treated, and still treat, with respect the mortal remains of man, for in this they all obey a natural instinct which comes from God. But consider all that men have done for the body of man after death had touched it, from the pagans of antiquity, whose supreme satisfaction was to mingle the ashes of their dead in a sacred urn, to the idolators of our own day, whose only consolation is to cover the remains of those for whom they weep with costly marble, gold, and inscriptions. Then compare what the Christian religion does in the present and promises for the future to this same body: you will see clearly the distance which separates all human religions from the religion brought to the earth by God Himself.

CHAPTER II

THE WORLD OF THE ELECT

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth."—APOCALYPSE.

I.

IF in certain respects the world was made for men, it is necessary that when man's body is glorified, the elements which compose this world should also be improved, in order that Creation may become a more suitable abode and wear a more smiling aspect. For the Apostle says that *corruption cannot possess incorruption.* Places which have been profaned by certain crimes must undergo a purifying process before the holy mysteries can be celebrated there; in the same way the elements must be purified before their glorious transformation.*

The chief of the Apostles informs us that this transformation of the world will take place by fire.

When the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with the burning heat, we look for new heavens and a new earth, in which justice dwelleth.†

Let us not believe that these worlds with

* St. Thomas, *supra*, Q. LXXIV.

† St. Peter, Second Epistle, chap. iii.

which Divine power has peopled space will one day be annihilated.

"He who is able to create disdains to destroy."

Why, indeed, should God have drawn the Universe from nothingness if He was one day to plunge it back again?

Does a genius create a masterpiece, a monument, a statue, a picture, a book, in order to destroy it when he has finished it?

We all, by an instinct higher than our needs, feel drawn to preserve and perfect, to beautify if we can, not only the things we possess, but those we make use of, which enter into our life, and have their place, small or great, in our existence, by which they seem to form part of our being. How dear the paternal roof, even a poor one, beneath which God caused us to be born, becomes as we advance in life and circumstances separate us from it! What a world of memories is evoked in our heart by these places where our first games were played, which witnessed our first joys and also, at times, our first troubles! Above all, can we see without tears that old church to which our mother, holding us by the hand, took us each Sunday to pray . . . that belfry from which the joyous peals of bells brought sweet and holy suggestions to our souls . . . and lastly, the churchyard where our forefathers sleep, and in which we ourselves will

rest before long after the battle of life? . . . The vision of these things, even considered at a distance, makes us ready to exclaim with the poet:

" Inanimate objects ! have you then a soul
Which takes hold of our soul, and forces it to love ?"

Therefore the instinct of destruction is only to be found in the heart of a fool or a villain.

Consequently we must not be surprised to hear that the following proposition of Origen was condemned by the fifth Œcumenical Council: *At the end of time the substance of bodies will be destroyed.*

As we have said already, the Universe does not return to nothingness; on the contrary, it continues its march towards that perfection which is the plenitude of its being. On this point Science agrees with Theology; and common sense declares it by the very name of *Universe* which is given to Creation as a whole, for the etymology of this word is *universus :* turned towards unity.

When the millions and hundreds of millions of worlds now scattered throughout infinite space have attained the point assigned to them from the beginning by almighty power, when the heavens have been dissolved and purified by the heat of fire, then, according to St. Peter, will come the great day of

the Lord. Then the seventh day of the week of Creation will end, and the work of the Creator will attain perfection. Then there will be *one fold and one shepherd*, as Christ declared. It is evident that this was the eternal world which the great Seer of the Apocalypse beheld in the distant centuries to come when he penned these lines: *I saw a new heaven and a new earth. . . . And I heard a great voice from the throne, saying: Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and He will dwell with them. They shall be His people: and God Himself with them shall be their God.*"*

We will endeavour in anticipation to cast a timid glance on this world set apart for God's glory and His creature's happiness. It is the great book which God will then have finished writing; if we cannot read it, we may at least endeavour to spell a few pages of it.

II.

In order to make clear the reason of the transformation of the world, let us turn first of all to a page from the writings of St. Thomas, to whom we must always come back when we wish to penetrate farther into the arcanum of theological science. "The material elements were created for man. We understand this from the words of the

* Apocalypse xxi., 1, 3.

Psalmist: *Lord, Thou hast set man over the works of Thy hands; and Thou hast subjected all things under his feet.** These material elements are of use to man in two ways: they supply what is necessary to his bodily life, and they help him to know God, for man when he beholds them has a glimpse of the Divine perfections, as St. Paul said: *The invisible perfections of God . . . being understood by the things that are made.*† Now, when man enters into glory he will no longer need material nourishment, since his body will be incorruptible. . . . Neither will he need to raise himself to the intellectual knowledge of God by the consideration of material things, since his soul will be able henceforward to view directly the Divine Essence. But the flesh can never rise to this contemplation. That is why man, even after he is glorified, must seek the resplendent glory of God in the material beings of Creation. First of all, he will contemplate the transfigured flesh of Christ, then the glorious bodies of the Elect, and, lastly, the material objects of the created world. It will then become necessary for these objects to receive from God a greater splendour than they possess at present. This splendour will not be of a different nature from that which they possess at present, but it will be incomparably greater. These, then, are the changes which

* Ps. viii. † First Epistle to the Romans.

will take place in the material world: man will be glorified and the Universe will be transformed."*

The Universe having been drawn from nothingness to express the Divine thought, there is not an atom in it which does not possess a meaning. We know, through the teachings of Catholic Theology, what are the qualities of the human body transfigured by glory.

First of all, *Impassibility*. In virtue of this quality the Elect will no longer suffer cold or heat, hunger or thirst, sickness or death. *The body*, says St. Paul, *will rise again incorruptible*.†

Light. The Just, holy Scripture tells us, *shall shine like stars to all eternity*.‡ We not only have texts which make this quality known to us—we have the Transfiguration on Mount Thabor. This flesh which *shone like the sun* was our flesh, and such is indeed the glory which awaits it on the eternal Thabor which we call Heaven.

Subtility. Our bodies will be, as it were, spiritualized. Even as in this world we see the rays of the sun traverse the thickest crystal without finding any obstacle, so after the Resurrection we shall be able to pass through all material substances without

* St. Thomas, *supra*, Q. XCI., Art. 1.
† First Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xv.
‡ Dan. xii.

the least effort. It was thus that Jesus Christ, after His Resurrection, appeared in the midst of His disciples, *the windows and doors being closed.*

Agility. By virtue of this fourth quality, which is even more wonderful than the others, our bodies will be able to move through space with the rapidity of thought. *Our flesh,* says St. Paul, *which is sown in weakness, shall rise in power.** "We must believe," St. Augustine also tells us, "that our bodies will then be such that we can be everywhere, wherever we will."†

Besides, let us not forget to notice that these qualities of glorious bodies are rendered necessary by the splendour and immensity of the glorified world. If our flesh were not in some measure spiritualized, how could it sustain the splendour of such glory? Like the three Apostles of Christ, on the rock of the Transfiguration, we should fall down dazzled and blinded. Unless our body were able to cross space with the rapidity of thought, why should God have sown the immensity of the heavens with innumerable worlds? It is because they never troubled to open the books of St. Thomas, which contain the whole school of Catholic Theology, that modern writers have been led into such gross misrepresentations as we find on this

* First Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xv.

† Sermon on the Resurrection.

page, which has been too often quoted: "Behold in this strange heaven, tier above tier, the Elect seated in order, side by side, each one in the place marked out for him by his performance of the labours of his earthly pilgrimage, absorbed in fixed contemplation from which nothing will ever distract them, and clothed for ever with those earthly bodies in which death seized them, the fatal seal of everlasting immutability. What are they doing there, those cowardly phantoms? Are they indeed living, or are they not rather dead? Ah! Christ, this paradise terrifies me, and I prefer my life with its troubles, its trials, and its sufferings, to this immortality of sanctimonious peace!"*

There is nothing in Catholic Theology to justify such a picture, and the author may well regret having written such a page!

III.

According to St. Thomas the world of the Elect will be before all else a world of light. This is also the feeling of the Church, for what she never ceases to ask for those of our brethren who have been taken from us by death, what she will one day ask for ourselves, is *eternal light* (*Lux perpetua luceat eis, Domine!*). This teaching is profoundly rational. What God will be for our soul,

* Jean Reynaud.

created light will be for our flesh. *Lord*, says the Psalmist, *in Thy light we shall see Light.**

Even in our present life what power God has given to light! How poor are the senses of scent, taste, and touch, compared to the sense of sight! Does not our organ of vision, which yet is so feeble and delicate, seem to bring our soul in actual contact with what is immeasurable, infinite, and Divine?

Listen to these few words in which a master-mind† makes known to us the feelings which possessed him when he was confronted with one of the great wonders of our sphere: "When I arrived above the cataract,‡ and looked down on that stupendous fall of waters . . . I realized how near I was to my Creator, and the first and last impression which I received of this sublime spectacle was a *feeling of peace*, like a recollection of things of the past, and *a foretaste of eternal rest and happiness*."

Following the same train of thought, we shall always retain the memory of what we saw one evening by the seashore.

The sun had just disappeared beneath the waves, on the brink of the horizon. But the whole sky was still bathed in its light. Its rays, encountering clouds of every dif-

* Ps. xxxv. 10. † Charles Dickens.
‡ Of Niagara.

ferent shape, built up with them fantastic worlds. Here rose mountains of fire, at their feet deep valleys opened, heavily shadowed; there in purple oceans floated islands with golden strands; further on the azure sky showed depths in which the eye lost itself. But the finishing touch to the splendour of this spectacle was that through all these wonderful worlds were trails of light which seemed like paths for the use of heavenly spirits who might be pleased to wander through these dazzling regions!

Alas! the vision only lasted a few minutes, for the shadow was rising from our earth. At its approach all these worlds grew dim, and presently faded away! All that remained to my companion and myself, after a quarter of an hour's rapt and silent contemplation of these unearthly splendours, was a memory!

Such thoughts as these—but far more lofty and better expressed!—filled the minds of Augustine and Monica, when, seated at a window by the seashore at Ostia, they gazed at the immense horizon. "Alone together at this window," wrote St. Augustine afterwards in his *Confessions*, "we began to converse with unspeakable sweetness; and forgetting the past in order to think only of the future, we proceeded to ask ourselves what would be the happiness of the saints above

in eternal life, that happiness which no eye has ever seen, no ear ever heard, no heart imagined. Carried away by a fresh outburst of love towards this immutable happiness, we passed by in turn all bodily things, and this very sky, resplendent with the glow of the sun which was about to disappear from our eyes, of the moon and the stars which were beginning to shine above our heads, and rising still higher in our thoughts and words, in the delight which was inspired by Thy works, we came to our souls. But we did not stop here; we passed on to attain at last that region where the true life, abundant, inexhaustible, eternal, exists; and there, as it appeared to us, we felt such an impulse of love for Thee, O my God! so bold and so powerful, that our heart seemed to leap towards it and touch it. . . ."

If in our valley of darkness and tears Nature is sometimes invested with such splendour and beauty, what will it be in that eternal world which Science itself shows us bathed in the rays of thousands and thousands of suns that never set, and in which Faith represents to us the blessed inhabitants mounting from light to light, towards more and more dazzling heights: *A claritate in claritatem.**

* St. Paul, Second Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. iii.

IV.

Yet what we see will probably be surpassed by what we shall hear.

Our soul, even now, feels in itself that Heaven is not only a vision, but also a harmony. Every chord of music awakens emotions which seem to come from a higher world, since they have the power to lift us to it. Someone has said that he could not listen to a beautiful concert without believing in immortality. It is not necessary to be a great artist in order to understand what truth there is in these words; we need only surrender ourselves to the impression which is left on our soul when a very beautiful melody, or grand and mighty chords, fall on our ear. It is like the breath of eloquence, but more mysterious still; our heart is moved, our flesh quivers, a shiver runs through our veins, something Divine seems to envelope us, to penetrate us, to draw us far away from this world into unknown regions.

Our beautiful Christian religion responds to our inmost desires, when it paints Heaven as a world of delights where all the inmates join in an immense concert to chant their Creator's glory! Listen to the prayer of the priest who offers the holy Sacrifice in the name of all his brethren: Most holy Lord, Father Almighty, eternal God . . . the Heavens, the virtues of the Heavens, the

happy Seraphim, are already united in the same happiness to sing to Thy glory. We beseech Thee, grant that we may one day unite our voices to theirs.

"We shall then sing in Truth," said St. Augustine, "whereas here below we sing in Hope. Hope and Love sing now; Love will still continue to sing, but whereas here below it is famishing love, there above it will be love satisfied."*

The Church is so persuaded that everything in Heaven sings of the glory of God, that earthly melodies and chords are to her only a distant and miserable echo of the eternal harmonies.

The great composer† who, wishing to glorify the Queen of Heaven, summoned heavenly beings to the assistance of his genius, was surely well inspired:

"Spirits of love and harmony,
Send us your glowing words
To sing the praises of Mary,
Virgin, spouse, and mother of God!"

We shall go one day to hear and take part in these Divine concerts, and on that day the great invitation which the Church puts on our lips and addresses to every human creature will be answered. In affliction of heart and darkness of spirit we have repeated again and again in this land of exile:

* Sermon cclv. † Gounod.

" Praise the Lord in the highest heavens !
Praise Him, all ye heavenly spirits !
Praise Him, luminous stars and planets !
Praise Him, heavenly Dominations and Powers !"

Eternity will reply to this call of time. All Creation will sing the glory of its Creator. Earth and sky, the stars and the suns, with all the elements of which they are composed, will form, as it were, an organ, universal, infinite, the chords of which will resound with the thoughts, adoration, and love of millions of Elect and hundreds of millions of heavenly Spirits; and they will all sing, joining in a never-ending concert: *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord our God. Heaven and earth are full of His glory. Hosanna in the highest !*

It was the echo of these Divine harmonies which St. John heard, no doubt, when coming out of an ecstasy he wrote in his Apocalypse: *I heard . . . every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard all saying : To Him that sitteth on the throne, benediction and honour and power for ever and ever.**

V.

But however great the splendours which we shall contemplate in the world of glory, however beautiful the harmonies which fall

* Apocalypse v.

on our ears, there will yet be for us a source of still purer joy and higher happiness, for that which we see and that which we hear it will then be given to us to understand.

Oh! it is true that here below we see at times great visions and hear Divine melodies, but in the very moment of ecstasy a vague sorrow invades our soul.

Why is what we see so beautiful? Why are we enchanted with what we hear? Alas! as a great poet wrote in an immortal poem:

"The last word has not been said by any living man."*

This, after millions of years, is the carrying out of that fatal sentence by which man, in punishment for his revolt against God, was condemned to ignorance.

But the consequences of sin will not penetrate to Heaven, any more than sin itself. And St. Paul assures us of a necessary truth that in Heaven there will no longer be any secrets for us when he says: *When that which is perfect is come, we shall see without a veil, and know without mystery.*†

Yet the dreams of Science and genius were beautiful, pure, and deep!

Remember Archimedes discovering a simple law of the physical world!

* Henri de Bornier, *La Fille de Roland.*

† First Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xiii.

Imagine Raphael contemplating the Transfiguration, the work of his brush !

Pause before Mozart listening to his last composition, the *Requiem Mass*, just before he dies !

Yet their art remained an enigma to them ! Their work, now that it was finished, appeared imperfect. They had seen their ideal in the distance and saluted it, but all their genius was powerless to fix its beauty. A few lines, a few strokes, a faded shadow—that was all that remained to them !

Listen to this:

Newton's last moments had come. One of his most sincere admirers, wishing to strengthen him with consoling words, drew near and assured him that his immense discoveries would be the admiration of all ages, and that his name would thus remain immortal. "My discoveries ?" replied the dying man. "What are they compared to the entire truth ? I am like a child who, by means of a shell, should draw a few drops of water from the sea and bring it to land while the entire ocean remained for him unknown and unexplored. But," he exclaimed with enthusiasm, "what consoles and delights me is the knowledge that in a few moments I shall enter on this ocean of truth in order to explore it and comprehend it !" These words were worthy to be the intellectual testament of this great genius, who never

heard the name of God pronounced without baring his head and bowing with pious reverence.

"O my soul!" each one of us may exclaim with St. Augustine, "what dost thou know at present? Only a few portions of the whole, that admirable whole of which each creature is only a particle, and ignoring which thou findest thy joy in this particle. But if thou didst know that whole! If God had not condemned thee only to see the particles, with what enthusiasm and what impatience wouldst thou not wish that that which exists at present might pass away in order that thou mightest behold that all of which this is only a part."*

CHAPTER III

THE ELECT

"They shall shine like stars through all eternity." —DANIEL.

I.

Is it necessary to prove to the reader who has followed us through the preceding chapters that in Heaven we shall recognize and love one another?

This recognition and this mutual love will

* *Confessions.*

form an essential part of the happiness of the Elect.

Let us read and meditate a truly remarkable page on this subject from the writings of Ludolph the Carthusian, the celebrated monk of the fourteenth century, to whom we owe a most beautiful life of Jesus Christ.

"Take notice that the Apostle gives us to understand that there are three Heavens, when he tells us that he was rapt to the third Heaven. The first of these Heavens, according to the doctrine of St. Augustine, is a material Heaven, adorned by the stars. The second is spiritual, composed of heavenly spirits. The third is super-intellectual, the Divinity is its sole element. It was to this third Heaven that St. Paul was raised. For he was not merely admitted to the contemplating of heavenly bodies, nor even to the knowledge of the Angels, but to the actual vision of the purely Divine Essence."*

We may here recall the precise and rational doctrine by which the Angel of the Schools, St. Thomas, teaches that since flesh, even glorified, cannot rise to the direct vision of God, it will be necessary in Heaven that our bodily eyes should find the reflection of Divine beauty in material creatures. "The contemplation of the Divine Essence," he says again, "will not prevent the saints

* *Life of Jesus Christ*, vol. iv.

from feeling sensible things, nor from contemplating creatures, nor even from action. This feeling, this contemplation, this action, will in no way distract them from the beatific vision of God. Was it not so with Our Lord during His mortal life ?"

The Church, besides, has never had, nor allowed her children to have, any doubt on this subject. It would be easy to show proof upon proof of this. Does not she put into the mouth of the priest who offers the Holy Sacrifice for the repose of the souls of his father and mother this touching prayer: *Lord, who hast commanded us to honour our father and mother, have compassion on the soul of my father and of my mother. Forgive them the faults committed in life, and grant me the grace to see them again in the happiness of eternal light.*

It is, therefore, their ignorance of Christian Theology and their forgetfulness of the teachings of the Church which has led certain writers to represent the Elect as so absorbed in the beatific Vision, that they remain eternally with their gaze fixed upon God. " They who thus rest have nothing human left in them; they no longer think, they no longer remember, they no longer move. All has disappeared — emotion, the activity of the mind, the aspirations of knowledge, individual character. They contemplate, adore, and sing, attached to circles which

widen by degrees, corresponding rays of the same sun, I had almost said spokes of the same wheel, equally straight, equally unbending, each starting from the same centre."*

II.

"My friend," said a pagan, "be careful not to belittle meanly in your mind that Nature which is so great."†

We, who are the sons of the Gospel, who live in the centre of light, and who know that *Nature* is the work of a personal God, whose almighty power is at the service of His infinite love, should be far more inexcusable if we were to *belittle meanly* that which will one day be most Divine in Nature: the happiness of the Elect and the glory of God.

But let us be on our guard against what is small and ugly; it may be the work of man, it is certainly not the work of God. On the contrary, the greater an idea, the more beautiful an object, the more likely it is to be true. Is not God an artist of infinite power? Greatness without bounds, beauty without a shadow, these, as it were, are His signature to His works. *The light of Thy countenance, O Lord,* exclaimed David, *is signed upon us.*‡

The Christian Heaven is the place in which

* Madame de Gasparin, *Les Horizons célestes.*
† Democritus. ‡ Ps. iv.

all happiness is found. Next to that of seeing God in all His beauty, of being inebriated with His eternal love, is there any joy to be compared with that of finding there once more those we have loved on earth, and of being able to love them for ever and ever?

"Could I believe that a purer love exists beyond the tomb I were too happy. Filled with ardour and joy, I would hasten to follow in thy footsteps along the Divine way."*

This cry, which a poet puts into the mouth of a pagan on the point of conversion in the early ages of the Church, is one which rises naturally from the heart of every man.

To support this doctrine we appeal to the testimony of one of the most extraordinary men whom God has ever sent into this world, Napoleon I. Only a few hours before his death he said to one of the Generals who had followed him to the bleak rock of St. Helena: "When I am dead, each one of you will have the consolation of returning to Europe. You will see your relations and your friends. As for me, I shall find my brave comrades again. Kleber, Desaix, Bessières, Duroc, Ney, Murat, Masséna, Berthier, will all come to meet me."†

* Marquis de Ségur, *Poème de Sainte Cécile.*

† Beauterne, *Sentiments de Napoléon sur le Christianisme,* p. 129.

III.

What will that day be to us on which we shall meet again, in the *land of the living*, those beloved beings who one after another have vanished from our side? In the *Land of Exile* our affections were at once exquisite and miserable: exquisite through the infinite joy with which at times they overflowed our heart; miserable by the obstacles which threatened to overpower them, and the trials and anxieties in the midst of which they must exist. But miserable, above all, on account of death, the terrifying death, which must without fail, and often at the moment when it was farthest from our thoughts, come and take them away for ever!

"O Lord, what a strange gathering is this, and what a strange family! Souls meet for an instant, only to separate and pass on! They greet one another, embrace and part. Oh! how far we are from the abode of enduring life, of life united! O God! can this state be Thy ultimate end and purpose in Creation? O Lord, our heart protests! our heart cries out to Thee! Thou allurest us with love; Thou showest us beauty and goodness, which inspire us with love, and joined to this love a great attraction, an irresistible force, the need of eternity. For ever! for ever! That is

the first cry, inspired by Thee, O my God, of every soul when it lives for the first time. Yet after this Thou robbest us, immediately almost, and for ever, of the object for which Thou gavest us an eternal love. What are we to make of all this, O my God ?"*

All this is the passage from time to eternity. We are in this world of suffering and darkness like a child in its mother's womb, presently to be brought forth to a better life, the only true life.

Know you not, says St. Paul, *that every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain even till now ?*† And the same Apostle takes pains to assure us that all these sufferings are nothing in comparison with the glory which will appear one day in every one of us.‡

But amongst all the joys and rewards which are reserved for us in eternal life is there one which has such power, even now, to thrill our hearts as the eternal reunion with the dear ones who have disappeared from our midst in the tomb ?

Ah ! it needs no effort to recall these memories ! The names of these cherished creatures, your remembrance and love of them, is treasured in the depths of your heart as in a holy sanctuary. Time, which

* Père Gratry, *De la Connaissance de l'Âme,* vol. ii., p. 228.

† Epistle to the Romans, chap. viii. ‡ *Ibid.*

destroys everything else, has been powerless to lessen your sorrow. Rather has it deepened it, as we see the waves of the sea encroaching year after year on the shore. But what saddens your remembranec of them and is painful to your love is that your soul too often beholds them with the marks of the long battle of life, or the anguish of suffering, more than this, with the havoc caused by death on their features. What a surprise, followed by what joy and intoxicating delight, when you meet them again beyond the grave! Picture beforehand this meeting. They left you exhausted by most cruel suffering, behold them now radiant with happiness! They were bruised and disfigured by the battle of life, the last struggle of death, now they are transfigured by immortality! Time robbed you of them, eternity gives them back to you! Throw yourself into their arms, clasp them to your heart. Now, in all security, you may repeat to them, and hear from their lips, those vows of everlasting love which formerly your soul trembled to utter, for the world you then inhabited was not vast enough to contain them. Child, hasten to your mother's breast; mother, clasp to your heart the child you so tenderly love, for it was not only during the short moment of your exile, but for ever, that God gave you to one another. . . . Husband and wife, throw

yourselves into each other's arms, and recognize the power of that Sacrament by which God formerly, at the foot of His altar, united your souls for time and eternity. . . . Brother, hasten to your brother, friend to your friend, and understand at last that all which was pure, noble, and exalted in your earthly affections came from God. It was, in truth, His Divine hand which dropped these seeds of happiness on your soul. They sprouted in time through many a storm, and grew up in the midst of many upheavals: but now they will flower and open out in full bloom in immortal splendour, in the Divine sun of eternity. You may love now without fear, for henceforward your *angelic natures** can only desire what is good and true—that is, all which can draw them closer to one another and to God!

"What value could we attach to the affections of time," as Monsignor Gay admirably expressed it, "if we could suppose that those of eternity would annul them, if not repudiate them? In Heaven, therefore, in the full blaze of glory, where all is order, harmony, holiness, and security, we shall still love, and incomparably more than here, those who on earth had special claims, either by nature or grace, to our affection. We shall not feel that kind of love for others,

* St. Matt. xxii.

even if they are as holy as the Seraphim or as beautiful as the Archangels. It is a fact, says St. Thomas, *that what is virtuous, far more the love of what is holy, will not cease to exist in the souls of the Blessed.** Who even will dare to assert that while the friendships which already existed will continue above, others may only then spring into life? Apart from the sudden and ardent sympathy which may then break forth between souls not permitted to encounter on earth, but whom God destined beforehand to be drawn together with singular agreement, would not the revelation which may then be made to them of a loyal devotion which they neither knew of nor appreciated, of services rendered of which only God knew the secret, inspire in just and faithful souls a tender and special affection in return?"†

IV.

An eastern apologue relates that a certain man possessed a casket filled with priceless diamonds. But he knew that if he yielded to the temptation of opening it these diamonds, on being exposed to the air and light, would instantly be changed into common coal.

* *Summa Theologica*, 2a, 2ae, Q. XXVI., Art. 12.

† *De la Vie et des Vertus Chrétiennes*, vol. ii., p. 439.

It is thus with the Christian in this world. He knows that his belief in Heaven contains a happiness beyond all price, but if he tries to see it, to touch it, to analyze it, only common and vulgar objects remain in his hands and meet his gaze.

We must have the tongues of Angels in order to speak of Heaven, and in order to understand Heaven we must be one of the Elect.

Let us not seek, then, to measure those oceans, so wide and deep that they turned the great Apostle giddy, so that after beholding them for an instant he could only cry out: *O the depth of the riches of the wisdom of God !** Let us be content to place once more before the reader those beautiful teachings of Catholic Theology, which are so consoling to the heart, and so satisfying to our reason.

The first source of happiness for the Elect will be the love of God, and this alone would be sufficient to ensure them eternal joy. Did not this love bestow supreme happiness even on earth ? Did not the heart of man find more true joy in an hour passed before the altar than in whole ages spent amidst the vain pleasures of the world ?

It was not a saint, but a worldling, who sent forth this cry from the depths of his wounded and disillusioned soul:

* Rom. xi. 33.

"Ye silent cloisters, vaulted roofs of convents, ye know, ye sombre caverns, how to love! Beneath your chilly naves, above your stony pavements, which burning lips have pressed and swooned away. . . .

"Tell them that e'er they learn to know what means such love as yours, their knees must wear away the marble tombstone o'er the grave."

Yet it is without having seen God that the saints have loved Him with ecstatic fervour. What will it be, then, when He manifests Himself to us in the glory of His goodness, His power, and His beauty, diffusing splendour, shedding torrents of light, which emanates from Himself, on all created objects, with a dazzling brightness undimmed by any shadow. Oh! if God had not taken care to give us already beforehand some participation in His divinity, who could bear such splendour or contain such happiness? Our whole being would be destroyed, burnt up, annihilated, like a drop of dew falling on a blazing furnace.

Our happiness in loving God will be increased, not in its essence, but in our soul, by the consciousness that all who are dear to us love Him also, with us, as much as we do, perhaps even more than we do. Was it not

our greatest grief on earth when a soul we cared for turned away from God? For sin is a greater and deeper gulf between two souls than death. On the other hand, when the beloved one shared our faith, our hope, our prayer, our love, was it not like a foretaste of heavenly joys? Did we not feel that our mutual affection was more lasting than time, stronger than life, and would be eternal like the God who was the bond of union between us?

We remember two souls united by one of those ideal affections which are only fostered and brought to maturity by the religion of the Gospel. Seeing the approach of death, that inexorable death which was so soon to place the gates of the grave between them, they wished to receive Communion together for the last time. The priest broke the Sacred Host, and the two fragments brought to one the grace and strength he needed for the great journey, and to the other resignation and the courage to bear the long exile. It is thus that in Heaven all those who love will communicate together, receiving the same God. But then it will not be to acquire strength in order to endure suffering, but to love one another better as they love God more and more.

We have just indicated the second source of happiness, that which the Elect will find in the love which God permits them to have

for one another. "When souls have once reached their end," wrote Father Lacordaire, "that is to say, God, they see themselves and all objects in God, as here below we see, though in an imperfect manner, the Universe in the light of the sun. There, in that immensity without a shadow, they touch and possess one another as they were never able to approach each other in the days of their mortal pilgrimage. The closest union on earth in comparison is only a vain effort, a barren endeavour to draw nearer together. Those who have loved in time will be surprised to have loved so little, and the revelation of love will be equal to their ignorance of it until then."*

Lastly, the third source of happiness is, as we said already at the beginning of this chapter when we quoted a passage from Ludolph the Carthusian, the contemplation of the world transfigured by glory. Then, *time will be no more,* as we read in the Apocalypse; *the substance of this world passeth away,* wrote St. Paul.

How wonderful this world of the Elect will be, on the preparation of which God has expended His Almighty power! Even here below, the world, which sin has made so miserable, still retains such splendid manifestations of the Divine beauty, and fills our soul, darkened as it is by the senses,

* *Lettres à des jeûnes Gens.*

with such enthusiasm that our flesh is thrilled with emotion. What shall we say or think of that glorious world beheld by those beings which have already *received the power to become the sons of God ?**

Yet when we seek to describe this splendour, and to paint this happiness, human language becomes poor, our thoughts are dazzled, and our pen remains idle !

We are content to finish this chapter by quoting the following lines, which we owe to Balmès:

" If our mind is staggered by the thought of the gigantic masses which compose the worlds, the wonder which we feel in face of the infinitely small is no less productive of astonishment and admiration. We are suspended between two infinities. As man in his weakness could not achieve either one or the other, he must be content with a glimpse of the whole. The day will come when in that better world, of which we have a most sweet and true expectation, he will see face to face and without a veil the secrets of eternal Truth."†

* St. John i. 12.

† *Philosophie Fondamentale.*

CHAPTER IV

THE GOD-MAN

"Then shall the Son of Man be seated on the throne of His glory."—ST. MATTHEW.

I.

IN Heaven, beside the Elect, our brethren, or rather above them, we shall see and love the saints, those heroes of faith and charity whom the Church honours on her altars. It was of them that the Prophet declared: *They that instruct many unto justice shall shine as stars for all eternity.** Jesus Christ confirmed the words of His Prophet: *He that shall do and teach, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.*†

It will, then, be impossible to doubt that Christian immortality was the only immortality.

It will then be recognized that a glass of water given to one of our less fortunate brethren brought more true moral greatness to a man than the winning of a battle or the founding of an empire.

We shall then, in short, see brilliantly manifested the truth of those words of Christ Jesus: *I say to you that many which are first*

* Dan. xii. † St. Matt. v. 19.

in this world *shall be last, and many which are* now *last shall be first* in eternal life.

How pleasant it will be to see, how delightful to hear, those great personages of eternity whose virtues we have so often admired, whose writings we have studied, and whose protection we have so often invoked in the course of our earthly pilgrimage! Part of our happiness is owing to them, and we gladly draw near to them, express our gratitude, and place ourselves under their direction, in order to go through the world of glory, admire its wonders, and come to a better understanding of the Divine laws.

In connection with this subject a curious anecdote, told by the Bollandists in the life of Blessed Bernard Tyron, comes back to our mind. One night, when he had left his cell in order to pray with greater fervour in the chapel of his monastery, he was astonished to see the choir of the chapel filled with religious who were all unknown to him. But what surprised him still more was that each of these religious seemed surrounded with a soft light which illuminated the whole chapel, and was so delightful to his eyes that he could not withdraw his gaze from the vision. He remained for some time, he did not know how long, in silent admiration, and then he decided to cross the threshold of the sanctuary, and, going up to one

more luminous than the rest, who occupied the Abbot's stall, he asked: "What is this mystery? Where do these religious come from? What are they doing at night in the sanctuary?" "All these whom you see here," replied the mysterious Abbot, "are former religious of this monastery. Here, more particularly in this chapel, we received from God those graces which brought us to Heaven. We love, therefore, to return from time to time to the places in which we prayed, suffered, and hoped, and thus merited the unspeakable happiness and glory which we now enjoy." Immediately afterwards these shining personages disappeared, one after the other, and all grew dark in the chapel.

This may be only a legend. But like all Christian legends it contains a great substratum of truth. For it is thus, no doubt, in the company of those who are dear to us, in the midst of those who have fought the good fight by our side, followed by those whom we have kept in the right way or brought back to the truth, under the direction of those who have been the dispensers of God's gifts to ourselves, that we should like to go and contemplate the marvels of the glorified Universe, to listen to the harmonies of celestial spheres, to mingle in those Divine concerts in which the countless phalanxes of the Elect and the Angels will

sing unceasingly to the glory of their Creator. It is thus, also, that we shall wish to revisit the earthly world, purified, but not destroyed; to visit the places in which we have lived, prayed, suffered, wept, but loved also, and hoped for the accomplishment of those Divine promises which will be realized then beyond our imaginings and our fondest dreams. Ah, no, our earth cannot, will not, be destroyed, nor will it pursue a useless and desolate course through remote deserts in space. Even if our Sacred Books had not assured us of this in twenty places, could we doubt its future destiny? It is true that this earth is only an atom in the immensity of the Universe. But this atom has been hallowed by the life and death of the God-Man. This earth has been trodden by the Eternal One; its soil has been impregnated with the tears, the sweat, and the blood of the King of Creation. It is, and it will remain, a world which is unique in time and in eternity. The Elect, from all the different worlds, as we fondly hope, will come to contemplate the holy places in which a God was born, lived, and died! They will kiss, with wonder and love, that glorious dust reddened by *the Divine blood, which,* as Origen said, *flowed on Calvary, but bathed the Universe.* For if the unfathomable mystery of the Incarnation raised up once the sons of Adam, without doubt the virtue

of this same mystery procured for the heavenly spirits who had remained faithful their confirmation in grace and their entrance into glory.

II.

Far more entrancing will be the vision of the Queen of Heaven.

It was she whom the Apostle St. John beheld when, rapt in God, he wrote in his Apocalypse: *And a great sign appeared in Heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.*

This heavenly sovereign has sometimes deigned to descend to this *land where we weep,* and to let herself be seen by men. The mortals who were favoured with this heavenly vision, whether ignorant or learned, sinners or saints, were at once absorbed in contemplation, their souls lost in depths of love and happiness.

Read the history of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary at the rocks of Massabielle. These apparitions are certainly not in any way a dogma of faith. But, at any rate, they constitute an historical fact, solidly established, on which human reason finds a fulcrum. No reflective mind, after reading this account, can escape from the mysterious supernatural influence which is evolved from it; we feel that there we are in contact with

that wonderful heavenly world of which the Gospel speaks to us on every one of its pages.

That poor child who came to pray on the banks of the Gave, near the grotto in which the apparition showed itself to her, was not in an ecstasy, still less carried away by excitement. All her learning consisted in saying her rosary. Until then she had never attended a Catechism class, and not knowing how to read or write, she had never read a religious book. How can we think, therefore, that she could imagine the ideal Beauty which throws her into an ecstasy ?

But let us follow the little seer as she makes her way through the crowd, without boldness, but without embarrassment, an immense crowd, which divides respectfully in order to let her pass.

She kneels and prays before the grotto as if she were quite alone, in the depths of a desert.

Her face pales a little at first, as though nature shrank from entering into the supernatural world which opens before her. But soon her features brighten, and her face begins to shine with a reflection of the world of glory. Her mouth opens, as though to inhale the air of Heaven. Her eyes, which do not move, behold an ideal Beauty, which none of those present can perceive, but all are conscious of its presence; all, so to speak,

see it reflected on her transfigured brow. This poor little shepherdess, so lowly that in her natural state anyone might elbow her to one side without noticing her, becomes ideally beautiful, like an Angel rapt in ecstasy on the threshold of Heaven, when the eternal gates open to admit him.*

Yet these eyes of flesh which beheld the blessed Virgin had not yet been purified by death! The world on which a few rays of eternal glory had fallen was a world of darkness and mire! And the vision scarcely lasted longer than a flash of light on a dark night.

But our senses will be spiritualized in Heaven, our soul will participate in Divine things, and our visions of glory will last for ever!

III

If the vision of a created being can thus transport us with ecstasy, what are we to say or think of the happiness which awaits the Elect when they contemplate uncreated Beauty in the adorable Person of the Incarnate Word?

Here, in truth, human reason grows confused, and human speech can only stammer.

We may, indeed, formally declare this

* See the account in a book by Henri Lasserre on *Our Lady of Lourdes*.

truth: *What the vision of the Divine Essence will be for our souls, the vision of Christ's Humanity will be for our bodies.*

We may go on to say: The Humanity of Christ will be the prism in which the Essence of the adorable Trinity will shine with a thousand lights.

As here below we receive the light of the sun even when it is not visible to our eyes, so also in Heaven, if we sometimes absent ourselves from the presence of Jesus, we shall still enjoy the radiance of His glory.

But what are these formal declarations, these images we try to conjure up in the state of intellectual poverty to which sin has reduced us? Mere words! Vain, dumb, and empty to our spirit materialized by the senses.

Yet these words cover oceans of truth, happiness, and glory.

The love of Jesus Christ! Already in the land of exile it was something so sweet, so consoling, so great, so deep, so strong, so intoxicating, that when a drop, a single drop, of this mysterious love fell on a heart it was filled with the most noble thoughts, the most saintly desires, and overflowed with happiness.

Listen to this confession of a child only twelve years old, who afterwards became a great literary genius:

"If I lived a thousand years I should

never forget certain evening hours when during recreation I used to escape from the companionship of my schoolfellows who were playing in the yard and enter the church. already growing dark with the shades of night, and with hardly any lights, by a little private door at the bottom of the choir, where I hid myself under the deeper gloom of a pillar. I wrapped myself closely round with my cloak . . . as though it were a shroud; I leant my head against the cold marble of a balustrade, and without heeding the passage of time, I abandoned myself to silent, profound adoration. I no longer felt the ground under my knees or beneath my feet. I was lost in God, as the atom, floating in the heat of a summer's day, rises up, is drowned and lost in the atmosphere, and, becoming transparent like the ether, seems as ethereal as the air and as luminous as the light."*

What, then, was the result when this drop of love, falling from the Divine ocean, found its way to the hearts of young men and maidens on the threshold of life? The young man paused on the brink of a brilliant career, broke with the fairest dreams of life, to become a priest, a monk, a missionary, burying his youth, later on his whole life, devoting it to the service of the altar, to the obscurity of study, to poverty, neglect, and persecution. The young girl gave up a

* Lamartine, *Confidences.*

home in which every wish was gratified, bade farewell to those she loved, and, exchanging her dainty garments for a coarse habit, devoted the rest of her life to the poor, the sick, to orphans—in a word, to all the forlorn ones of the earth. The world looked on, and pronounced it folly. How, indeed, could the world understand their happiness, since the only happiness which it knew was the wretched dregs of water found here and there in the ruts of the highway? Is not the love of Jesus Christ the only true one, since all other loves owe their worth to the measure of their participation in it? It was in search of this love that these souls, enamoured of the ideal, abandoned the world, and came to pass their days of exile as near God's altar as possible. . . .

Yet we had never yet seen, with our own eyes, this God who is so great and beautiful! His voice had never sounded in our ears, we had never encountered His gaze. The thick veil of the senses hung between us and Him, and only too often had dug a chasm between us! Moreover, we could not have borne the splendour of His glory in the land of exile. If He had allowed a single ray of His heavenly beauty to penetrate to us, as it did to the three Apostles on Mount Thabor, we should have fallen face foremost in the dust, dazzled and blinded; then sadly we

should have resumed the journey of life, inconsolable at the thought of the beauty we had seen for an instant and so quickly lost !

But in Heaven we shall behold Jesus Christ in all His glory, without being either dazzled or blinded, because our own flesh will also be transfigured by the Resurrection; we shall love Him as He will love us, with an infinite love ! And in this ecstasy our body, our mind, our soul, our whole being will be absorbed in endless admiration, in everlasting happiness !

Yet before this splendour the Seraphim themselves bow down, adore, and are silent.

Shall *we* not tremble, then, we miserable mortals, who dare to fathom with sight and thought such depths as these, lest the sacred oracle should pronounce against us: *He that is a searcher of majesty shall be overwhelmed by glory?** We should do better to fall on our knees, and repeat with the great monk of the thirteenth century: "When, O Lord, shall I stand to behold Thee ? When shall I contemplate the glory of Thy kingdom ? When wilt Thou be all in all to me ? Comfort me in my banishment, assuage my sorrow. I long to enjoy Thee intimately, but cannot attain to it. Blessed is the man who for Thee, O Lord, lets go all things created, who offers violence to his nature, and through fervour of spirit

* Prov., xxv.

crucifies the lusts of the flesh: that so, his conscience being cleared up, he may offer to Thee pure prayer, and may be worthy to be admitted among the choirs of Angels, having shut out all things of the earth both from within and without."*

* *Imitation*, book iii., chap. xlviii.

BOOK V

THE INFINITE MERCY

CHAPTER I.—ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

„ II.—PURGATORY.

„ III.—THE NUMBER OF THE ELECT.

„ IV.—THE SUPREME HOPE.

CHAPTER I

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

"Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate !" (*"All hope abandon ye who enter here"*).—DANTE.

I.

THIS is a chapter on which we embark with anguish of spirit; we should like to write it in tears.

Many a reader has followed us until now, perhaps not without enthusiasm. Christian immortality appears so ideally beautiful, even when described by such an unskilled pen as mine ! But when they see at the head of this chapter: *Eternal punishment*, will they not be tempted to pause and proceed no further ?

We beseech you, we implore you, dearly beloved soul, not to yield to this temptation.

Begin by recalling the words of Bossuet, so worthy of meditation: "God has His eternal truths, which He will not change because a few men have ceased to believe in them."

Next, we declare to you without hesitation that after reading these simple considerations on Hell the terrible Dogma will seem to you much more conformable to reason than your reason is now disposed to believe.

II.

Before going any farther we must draw attention to the fact that it was not the Christian religion which first brought the dogma of Hell to men. Wherever we go, to the most distant lands, far back in the bygone ages, it meets us everywhere and always. An impious writer of the eighteenth century wrote: "The doctrine of a future state, either of reward or punishment, seems to lose itself in the mists of antiquity; it precedes all that we know with certainty. As soon as we begin to disentangle the chaos of ancient history we find this belief, most solidly established, in the minds of the first nations we learn about."*

No, it was not Jesus Christ who brought the terrifying dogma of Eternal Punishment on earth. On the contrary, here as everywhere, bringing light He brought mercy and hope. The pagans peopled their Hell with the feeble, the insignificant, the obscure ones of this world. According to them it was sufficient to have been poor during life in order to be condemned to descend into the dark depths of Tartarus. The powerful, the noble, the great ones of the earth alone were privileged to enter the Elysian abode. What revolting injustice! How it makes

* Bolingbroke.

us understand that the first public words of the Saviour of the human race should be these: *Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven!**

Who but He who made the heart of man could have inplanted in it this terror of the punishment beyond the grave? We understand the hope of Heaven. We feel such a need of happiness! But the fear of Hell is horrible to our soul, crushing to our reason. We would all give anything to drive it away. But our efforts are vain! Those who pretend that they no longer believe in Hell are often the ones who think of it most and have the most lively fear of it. It is true that the thought of Hell awakens this fear even in the hearts of those who believe in the Gospel, but it is a rational fear, for we know that God is good, and that these punishments are not meant for those who love Him. To the impious man, on the contrary, this thought becomes a nightmare which haunts his wakeful hours and disturbs his night's rest. Voltaire's answer to the hare-brained youth who wrote to him: "I have just discovered a certain proof of the non-existence of Hell," is well known. "You are fortunate. I am far from having done so." This was the answer of the patriarch of modern impiety. It must be

* Sermon on the Mount.

said that by this time old age had come upon him, and that the great Beyond was close at hand!

III.

It is indeed true that to uproot the belief in the punishment beyond the grave from our heart it would be necessary first to uproot reason itself.

We know only too well, and perhaps to our cost, that the reward of virtue is not found below. From one pole of the globe to the other, virtue, truth and justice are continually ignored, often persecuted even. On the contrary, injustice, falsehood, pride and meanness lead but too often to power, riches, honour and success. This causes the incessant, forced appeal of the human conscience to the justice of God.

History relates that when Robespierre, the miserable wretch who had caused so many thousand innocent people to perish, was being taken to his death, a man of the people emerged from the crowd, and climbing on to the wheel of the doomed cart, looked into the face of the wretch whose distorted features, haggard eyes, livid countenance. and broken jaw, bore the marks of his recent attempt at suicide. "Robespierre," he cried to him, "you see that there is a God!"

This was the cry of the human conscience

which demands from God with equal insistence rewards for St. Vincent de Paul and punishment for Robespierre.

IV.

But if our reason exacts punishment for the guilty ones who leave this world without having expiated their sins, is it not terrified, filled with revolt even, by the thought that this punishment will be *eternal?*

What a crushing effect is produced by this word *eternity!* When our thoughts try to fathom its terrible depths, an immense abyss opens out, horrible and infinite. The ground gives way beneath our feet, our head goes round, we grow giddy, and are forced to go backwards.

Heap century on century, thousands of years on other thousands, hundreds of thousands on hundreds of thousands! When your imagination, exhausted, surrenders, you hear from the most distant of these heaped up centuries a voice which cries out: "Eternity, Eternity, you have only just begun!" For nothing at present can give us any idea of what is eternal, because we are imprisoned in time, the essence of which is *mobility.* But by death we acquire *immobility.*

The genius of a poet shows us the lost

watching for the hour of their deliverance on a clock which has stopped for ever. But:

"Nothing oscillates on the clock. No useless figures are shown on the dial, which bears but one motionless hand, and the one word, Eternity!"

Meditate on this figment of fancy for a moment. You may find in it a fleeting perception of what eternal means.

Indeed, what effect would the Dogma of a Hell which would one day come to an end produce on us? If even now, with the threat of eternal punishment, we find such difficulty in avoiding sin, would not the fear of a Hell limited by time be only a derisive curb to our passions? The attraction of the good things of this earth is so powerful, that everything pales before it, even the splendour of a future life. A German philosopher, disputing one day with his friends, declared: "I would give two *millions* of my eternal happiness to obtain such a thing." And the talented writer who quotes him adds: "He was *singularly moderate* in this sacrifice he proposed!"*

If Hell were not eternal, might not man deride God? "I know," the impious man

* Madame de Stael, *Reflections on Suicide*, quoted by Auguste Nicolas, *Philosophical Studies*, vol. ii., chap. viii

might say, "that Thou canst close Heaven against me, but not for ever, and that is enough for me. Time and eternity are mine; to Thee belong a few centuries, a few thousand centuries, if Thou wilt. But the hour will come when Thy punishments must end; and then the happiness of Thy servants and Thy friends will be mine."

Thus we should behold one day in Heaven the traitor Judas by the side of St. John the beloved, Nero beside St. Peter, fallen women by the side of those angels of virtue and purity whom we call Agnes, Cecilia, Clotilda, Joan of Arc! To uphold such a theory is to deny Divine justice and all justice, to deny man and God Himself!

V.

Let us form a clearer conception of the Christian Dogma, and we shall then see that eternal punishment detaches itself as a necessary, fatal consequence from this conception.

As we have already had occasion to say, souls are attracted towards God by *love*, they are driven far away from Him by *hate*. This is the general law of universal gravitation of spirits. Even in our present life we observe this law in ourselves. When we do good we feel ourselves drawn to God; when we yield to evil our soul is immediately

and mysteriously impelled in a contrary direction. It is like a beginning of Heaven or Hell in our hearts.

General de Lamoricière heard one day a Christian orator state this truth: "Our own conscience is the beginning of our heavenly happiness or our eternal misery." The great Christian soldier met the speaker on the following day, and, going up to him, shook him warmly by the hand. "You made a deep impression on me yesterday," he said. "I felt Hell and Heaven within me. It was indeed a true saying."

Death renders *eternal* what it finds in us. Heaven is therefore the eternal attraction towards God by love. Hell is the eternal rejection of God by hate. Like an extinguished star which, starting in space, falls from depth to depth farther and farther away from its centre, so the lost soul goes farther and farther from God across infinite space. Therefore, clearly understood, damnation is not so much a punishment inflicted by God as a state imposed by the will of the damned on themselves.

In vain might God offer forgiveness to these souls who have departed from the true way; they would answer like Milton's Satan: "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven!"*

"If sin were to cease for an instant in

* *Paradise Lost*, book i.

the soul," said the Perè de Ravignan, "if, free and repentant, its will ceased to be criminal, by that very fact Hell would cease to exist. But the soul does not change when this life is over; it cannot change, its end is fixed in the state of immutable eternity. Sin endures, Hell endures; it is impossible to separate them."*

According to Dante, " the absence of love is the greatest punishment of sinful will."

" The damned," says St. Thomas, " only know God in Hell by the punishments which His justice inflicts on them. Therefore the more they suffer the more they hate."†

Unfortunate wretches ! who henceforward only know how—and wish—to hate and blaspheme ! To hate goodness and blaspheme against Love !

What completes the misery of the damned soul is that, losing the sight of God, it also loses the possession of those who were dear to it in life. In losing God it has lost them also, and for ever ! It has entered into that region which St. Augustine calls *a region where there are no meetings."*‡

Our Sacred Books express it even better; they call it *the land of oblivion.*§ For no

* *Conférences de Notre Dame,* vol. iii.
† *Summa Theologica, 2a, 2ae,* Q. XIII.
‡ *Confessions, " In regione dissimilitudinis."*
§ Psalm, *In terra oblivionis.*

hand will ever lift, even for the gaze of the Elect, the veil which envelopes the damned. Indeed, how could they still love their brethren, those accursed ones, whose lips henceforth only open to utter imprecations against God ?

But we ourselves, can we in Heaven cease to remember them and no longer love them ? This is a mystery we cannot penetrate, before which in this life human reason stops short, trembling and aghast, unable to go farther.

It may, perhaps, be answered that the abyss which separates the Elect from the lost will make them henceforward two beings differing essentially, so that we should feel no more drawn to love one of those lost souls than we are now disposed to argue or discuss morality, ethics, or philosophy with a being deprived of reason, or to unite ourselves in bonds of friendship with one of those victims of debauchery whose mind and heart are atrophied by a brutal egoism and sunk in the mire of sensuality.

But it is more true to say that God has given us reason, not in order to understand eternal life, but in order to merit it. God is just, God is good, that should be enough for us. Although I may not be able to follow the meaning of His words, or to understand the wisdom of His acts, I submit and I adore.

It is true that this doctrine of eternal punishment makes us tremble; but, on the other hand, does it not reassure us as to the eternal destiny of those who have disappeared from our sight in the grave?

For there was no hatred of God in their hearts when death came to them. Even those whom it took by surprise, without giving them time to set their house in order, did not hate truth, goodness, and justice. They may, perhaps, have been too easily carried away by the seductions of the world, they may have been too much taken up with the deceitful pleasures of the earth. They may not have given sufficient thought to the good things of eternity, which are our only real blessings here below. But at least they never denied their Faith, nor blasphemed their belief, nor hated the God of their childhood. Since they did not hate God in life, why should they hate Him for eternity? "We believe," wrote St. Jerome, "that the devils and the impious men who said in their hearts, *There is no God,* will be punished eternally. But we believe that the works of those sinners who have not ceased to be Christians will be tried and purified by fire, and that God, being moved with regard to them, will treat them with clemency."*

The *purifying* sufferings of which the great

* *Commentary on Isaias.*

ascetic doctor speaks are not those of Hell; those will be eternal. Obviously he is thinking of Purgatory, which will be the subject of the next chapter. Let us, then, repeat with him when we think of those belonging to us who, after a life which was *culpable* perhaps, but not *criminal*, have entered on eternity: *They had not ceased to be Christians, God will treat them with clemency.*

Yes, we must hope and fear. We must fear for ourselves, for these eternal depths exist, and the abuse of God's graces may lead us there! But let us hope with regard to our dear ones who have disappeared from us in death; for the God whom they encountered on the threshold of eternity is not only the God of absolute justice, for all of us, poor descendants of Adam and Eve, He is also, and far more, the God of infinite mercy.

We conclude our study of this alarming question with the words of a holy priest of the last century, whom the Church has raised to her altars: "Our faults are like a grain of sand compared to the mountain of Divine mercy. God, when He is obliged to condemn a sinner, is like a mother forced to let down the knife of the guillotine on the head of her child."*

* *Catechisms of the Curé d'Ars.*

CHAPTER II

PURGATORY

"Oh happy, suffering soul! for it is safe!"—CARDINAL NEWMAN.

I.

THE Dogma of Purgatory does not need any proof. It commends itself naturally to our reason, and springs, so to speak, from the heart of man. The pagans, like us, believed in this Dogma. Their belief was vague, ours is precise. They did not know that communication is possible between us and the souls which suffer beyond the grave; but we, the sons of the Gospel, we know that these souls remember us, and that by our prayers and good works we can come to their assistance and hasten their entrance into eternal happiness. Here again, as everywhere else, it was not obscurity which the Christian religion brought upon earth; on the contrary, it came to throw light on a mystery which seems contemporaneous with our origin.

Let us follow the progress of this Dogma through the ages.

It was Plato who, four centuries before the Gospel, first spoke to us about it in this truly remarkable page: "Death is only the separation of soul and body. After this separation the soul appears before the Judge,

who examines it without any regard for the rank it occupied on earth. Frequently, even in the case of the great Persian King, or any other king or powerful personage, the Judge finds nothing sound or healthy in it. Free to follow its own inclinations, the soul has steeped itself in indolence, debauchery, intemperance, disorders of every kind, and overflows with baseness. Seeing which, the Judge orders it ignominiously to the prison, in which it will undergo the punishments it has deserved. Of these there are two kinds: those which are commanded in order that he who is justly condemned to them may reap benefit from them by becoming better, and those of which the object is to serve as an example to others, and lead them to correct themselves by the fear which they inspire. Now, those that the gods and men punish with the intention that this punishment should be profitable to them are those unfortunate ones who have committed sins which are curable. *Suffering does a real good to them, for only by suffering can they be delivered from their injustice.* But those who, having reached the limits of sin, are quite incurable, serve as an example to others without any good accruing from it to themselves, because they are incapable of being cured; they will suffer eternally the most terrible punishments."*

* The Republic.

Would not one say that the whole of this doctrine is that of one of the Fathers of the Church ?

After the Greeks, we quote the testimony of the Latins. The poet Ausonius relates that in the days when the Druids came and preached to the waves from the rocks of Sein, there was a certain night in the year, at the beginning of the stormy season, when the sailors who had been drowned during the year reappeared suddenly on the surface of the sea. Presently they reached the shore, where their ghosts wandered to and fro for hours, lamenting. A little while before the dawn of day these phantoms embarked on boats which broke loose from their moorings, and gained the high seas, steered by invisible mariners, directing their course, no doubt, to distant and mysterious isles. . . .

This belief still lingers on the coasts of Brittany. There is indeed a legend that, on the night of November 2, these unfortunate men who found death in the midst of the sea, and were not in a state of grace when they disappeared, rise from the submarine depths where they endure their purgatory, and appearing on the crests of the waves, cause the barques to capsize of those unbelieving ones who, instead of praying for the dead, have hoisted their sail and stood out to sea, tempted by the greed of gain. As a rule,

the fishermen on these coasts hang back from setting out on the two first days of November. They dread that "gust of wind of the dead."

But nothing in antiquity is so conclusive on this subject as what follows:

And the day following Judas came with his company to take away the bodies of them that were slain, and to bury them with their kinsmen, in the sepulchres of their fathers.

And they found under the coats of the slain some of the donaries of the idols, . . . which the law forbiddeth to the Jews: so that all plainly saw that for this cause they were slain.

So, betaking themselves to prayer, they besought the Lord that the sin which had been committed might be forgotten. . . .

Then the valiant Judas, making a gathering, sent twelve thousand drachms to Jerusalem for sacrifice, to be offered for the sins of the dead.*

For he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness had great grace laid up for them.

It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sin.†

What a deep meaning there is in this page of Scripture! Is not this the history of our own brethren, of all those for whom we weep? Was it not thus that they fell in the

* A drachm was worth about ninepence in our money.

† Second Book of Machabees, chap. xii.

battle of life, those brave companions of our struggle? Was it not thus that we lifted them in our arms to bear them to the tombs where their forefathers rest? They also *have fallen asleep in the faith.* But, alas! was their life unstained by sin? Did not their heart cling too much to the goods of this earth, the idols of every age? Did they not bear away with them a little of that earthly mire stained with which no soul can enter Heaven?

This thought pursues us, and deepens our sorrow at losing them! Let us, then, pray to God like the valiant chief of Israel, that He may forget their faults. Let us ask *that the Divine Sacrifice may be offered for them by the priest in the temple; for it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead!*

II.

But it was reserved for Christianity to state in precise terms the Dogma of the purifying expiation beyond the grave, and to make it a source of deep consolation and pious hope for our souls.

Thus prayer for the dead is a pious custom which became general even from Apostolic times. This is attested by the writings of the first Fathers of the Church; and the inscriptions in the catacombs, which the traveller may read in our own day, bear irrefutable testimony to this: *Lord, we beseech*

*Thee, grant that they may behold the paradise of light. Let any of our brethren who read this epitaph pray that the pure and holy soul of which the body reposes here may be received by God.**

We hear again the whole tradition of the first ages of the Church in the touching farewell of St. Monica to St. Augustine: *Do not trouble about my body*, it matters little where you bury it, the one thing I ask of you is that wherever you may be you will remember me at the altar of the Lord.'†

The Middle Ages gave a fresh impulse to prayer for the souls in Purgatory. Then those magnificent *Offices for the Dead* were created, in which a whole people, priests and laymen, united their voices in a heartrending appeal to the Divine compassion: *Lord Jesus Christ, King of Glory, we offer Thee victims and prayers; receive them, we beseech Thee, for those souls whom we commemorate this day before Thee. Through Thy mercy may they pass from death in time to life in eternity.*‡

" Pie Jesu, Domine,
Dona eis requiem !"

(" Loving Jesus, Our Lord,
Give them rest !")§

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* See the *Dictionnaire des Antiquités chrétiennes*, Article on Purgatory.

† *Confessions*, book ix., chap. xi.

‡ Prayers taken from the Mass for the Dead.

§ *Ibid.*

Only the perverted soul and degraded heart of a Luther could have dared to attack so old, so rational, and so consoling a custom. But if he succeeded in banishing the prayers for the dead from the Protestant liturgy, he was never able to uproot in the heart of his followers the need of these prayers and the belief in their efficacy. We could bring proof upon proof of this, but it is sufficient for our purpose to quote here the entreaty which a great poet of Protestant England puts in the mouth of a dying hero:

"I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He, within Himself make pure. But thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me, night and day."*

Arthur was a legendary King of the fifth century. It is evident that Tennyson, a Protestant, was persuaded that in that remote period of time Christians believed in Purgatory.

We have, besides, in our possession a little book called *Catholic Prayers in Use in the Church of England*. In this manual, recently published by a Protestant clergyman, there are *some very beautiful prayers for the dead!* . . . Was it worth while to wage such

* Tennyson, *Morte d'Arthur*.

bitter war during three centuries against Catholicism in order in the end to go back to its rites and its doctrines ?

Moreover, all Luther's calumnies and his hypocritical indignation against prayer for the dead had only this result—that whereas until then the doctrine of Purgatory, though admitted by all, was nevertheless left free, and a Catholic might reject it, if not without rashness, yet without ceasing thereby to belong to the Church; the Council of Trent now made it an article of faith: *If anyone says, that by sanctifying grace the guilt of his sin and its eternal punishment are so completely remitted that the penitent has no longer any temporal punishment to suffer in this world, or in the next, in Purgatory, before entering the kingdom of Heaven, let him be anathema.**

III.

At the same time that she cut off from her communion those who should reject the Dogma of Purgatory the Church laid down the following counsels, which are full of wisdom: *The holy Council ordains that the Bishops should take careful heed that the wholesome doctrine of Purgatory be believed and maintained among the faithful, and taught and preached everywhere. But they are not*

* Council of Trent, Ses. vi., Can. 30.

*to allow difficult and subtle questions on this subject to be proposed in ordinary preaching. For these questions do not as a rule lead to edification. They must also proscribe what is uncertain in preaching.**

Why have the authors of so many little books on Purgatory not followed these wise counsels? They would not then have strewn their writings with pretended revelations which too often resemble those of which St. Paul wrote to Timothy: *These things proposing to the brethren . . . nourished up in the words of faith . . . but avoid foolish and old wives' fables.*† They would not then have turned into a subject of terror which causes the heart to suffer and the reason to rebel a doctrine eminently adapted to the human conscience, which is full of hope for those who depart, and full of consolation and soothing power for those who remain behind.

We infinitely prefer the declaration of an eminent theologian of the last century:

"The attempt has often been made," wrote Monsignor Gay in his admirable treatise, "to picture the sufferings of the souls in Purgatory, but in all these attempts we feel an effort of the mind, barren in its results, to try and penetrate what God has not revealed. With the exception of these points of doctrine which have been defined

* Council of Trent, Ses. xxv.
† First Epistle to Timothy iv.

(and they are very few), the theology of Purgatory is one of the most humiliating pages of sacred doctrine; I mean one of those in which our ignorance and impotence are most pitilessly set forth."*

Yet since the beautiful and consoling doctrine of Purgatory has been so often distorted, we think it necessary to pause for a moment and consider it.

IV.

Purgatory is not a place of frightful suffering for *the just*, but one of Divine mercy for *sinners*.

Purgatory is like an *eighth Sacrament*,† even more merciful than the seven others.

Dante said of Hell that it had been created by *Love scorned*. We may say of Purgatory that it was created by *Love forgotten*.

Yet far be it from us to assert that the just, that is, the faithful believers who leave this world, will not have to fear a short stage in Purgatory. The vision of God is so dazzling! We must be pure indeed to support its splendour!

We have a special affection for a scene in which Cardinal Newman depicted the entrance of a just soul into eternal life.‡

* *De la Vie et des Vertus Chrétiennes* vol. ii., p. 560.

† Father Faber.

‡ *Dream of Gerontius.*

This soul has only just crossed the threshhold of that mysterious world, when, drawn by an irresistible impulse of love :

ANGEL.

" . . . . Praise to His Name !
The eager spirit has darted from my hold,
And with the intemperate energy of love,
Flies to the dear feet of Emmanuel;
But ere it reach them, the keen sanctity
Which with its effluence, like a glory, clothes
And circles round the Crucified, has seized,
And scorched, and shrivelled it ; and now it lies
Passive and still before the awful throne.
O happy, suffering soul ! for it is safe,
Consumed, yet quickened, by the glance of God.

SOUL.

Take me away, and in the lowest deep
There let me be,
And there in hope the lone night-watches keep,
Told out for me.
There, motionless and happy in my pain,
Lone, not forlorn,—
There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
Until the morn.
There will I sing, and soothe my stricken breast,
Which ne'er can cease
To throb, and pine, and languish, till possest
Of its Sole Peace.
There will I sing my absent Lord and Love:
Take me away,
That sooner I may rise and go above,
And see Him in the truth of everlasting day."

If, notwithstanding their nothingness and want of beauty, it were permitted us to

compare the shadows of earth with the Divine splendours of Heaven, we might find close at hand an image of the human soul wounded and scorched by celestial glory.

It is night. In the seclusion of your own room you are reading or studying by the light of a lamp on a fine summer's evening, when all of a sudden a night moth enters from without through the half-open window. From the shadowy gloom in which it dwells it has seen the light; it is drawn to it, fascinated. And the closer it approaches to it, the more powerful and irresistible becomes the attraction, until at last it dashes towards it with the full strength of its wings. But its power is spent against the clear crystal which covers the flame, and the puny creature falls back and drops on the ground, dazzled and trembling. If you wish it to live, pick it up and put it out into the night, otherwise it will again attempt to fly to your lamp, for *its love for the light is greater than its fear of pain.*

This is indeed the case of the human soul when through the opening of the eternal gates it perceives the uncreated light. It is dazzled, intoxicated, irresistibly attracted. It seeks to cross the threshold of this glorious world, and to spring forward towards that Divine vision. But it is not pure enough to sustain the effulgence of its splendour,

and it falls back far away from Heaven into the night of sorrow.

The Church, divinely inspired, never ceases, in her prayers for the souls which have gone before us, to ask for *eternal light* and *eternal rest*.

But this rest, this *tranquillity in order*, as theology calls it, is no longer possessed by these souls, can never more be possessed by them. For the remembrance of so much happiness, perceived for a moment and instantly lost, attracts and torments them; and their conscience tells them that they are not pure enough to bear its brightness. They remain out in the night and suffer.

O happy, suffering soul, for it is safe!

V.

Where is the place into which these souls fall and suffer? We know nothing certainly on this point. Some theologians have thought that certain souls undergo their Purgatory in the scenes of their earthly life. Hence the apparitions which are seen,* the noises which are heard, the sighs and groans in houses which death has recently visited.

"Theology grants and history proves," says Monsignor Gay, "that for reasons

* Read at the end of this book the authentic account of two such apparitions.

known to God these souls are sometimes allowed to wander to and fro in this world of ours, and even to haunt our dwellings; but this is exceptional, and probably rare. They certainly have a fixed abode; wherever it may be, it is low down, vast as an abyss, deep as a chasm, and bare as a desert !"

Poor souls ! who in one and the same moment have beheld and lost both God and Heaven ! How horrible this place must seem to them ! How long the days, the months, the years, perhaps, must seem to their impatience !

Do not we ourselves add to the sorrows of their exile by so soon forgetting them ? Oh ! if God would only permit their complaints to reach our ears ! Might they not say to us in the words of the poet:*

" Do you sometimes think of those who in the tomb, sleep chill and bare the long, last sleep of death; o'er whom the winter blows and snowflakes fall, and night laments ? No, you think not of them !

" Do you sometimes come and kneel beside the cold, damp, stone which covers them, and weep and dream, and pour the blessed perfume of your prayer upon their dear remains ? No, you forget them !

* Collin.

"And yet they loved you, and you loved them too, and would have given all you had in the dread hour of that last farewell to keep them with you! You do not even remember them now!"

Read again now that book of *Prayers for the Dead* which the Catholic Church puts into our hands; you may perhaps appreciate its beauty as you have never done before.

Woe is me, O Lord, cries the soul thus banished from Heaven, *that my sojourning in the land of exile is prolonged.*

I will lift my eyes to Thy holy mountain whence my help cometh. But if Thou, O Lord, shalt mark iniquities, who shall abide it?

We are the work of Thy hands, O Lord, reject us not!

But then, as if with the feeling that Heaven could not hear it on account of its numerous sins, it turns to us.

Have pity on me, at least you, my friends, for the hand of the Lord is heavy on me. Oh! that it were permitted that my complaint should reach you! that I might write it in a book, engrave it on lead, sculpture it in stone!

*But my sole hope is that my Redeemer liveth, and that one day I shall rise up. Then I shall see Him; my eyes shall behold Him. This my hope is laid up in my bosom.**

How sublime are these prayers! With

* This is all taken from the Office for the Dead.

what mysterious power they touch our hearts! What poetry has ever attempted so lofty a flight! What philosophy descends to such depths of meaning! Must not a religion which exercises such empire over us be indeed the Truth?

VI.

Widely different, no doubt, are the sufferings of those souls, which have greatly sinned, yet which nevertheless the Divine mercy wills to save.

St. Peter tells us in his Epistle that amongst those, stained with so many crimes, who were engulfed in the waters at the time of the Deluge by the Divine anger, *many were saved from damnation.* They were saved because at the sight of the terrible judgments descending upon them their faith in God returned to their souls. The awful death which overtook their bodies saved their souls. Let us never then despair of a soul's salvation, even if in its journey through life it had loaded itself with sins, even if it passed out of this world without a priest and without the Sacraments. Now also, as in the time of the Deluge, death is the great expiation of sin, and there are flashes of light in the last agony when the human soul discerns the approach of God, and has a glimpse of the eternal world. How can it fail to tremble on the brink

of such an abyss, beneath the weight of such misfortunes? But to tremble is already to believe! For a soul at such a terrible moment, to be inaccessible to repentance, would mean more than forgetfulness of God, it would be hatred.

But while this merciful doctrine opens out an infinite horizon to our hopes, it gives us a foreboding that for certain souls a long and painful expiation will be necessary. And here, no doubt, we find the explanation of those Purgatorial pains which certain theologians and certain saints have painted for us in such gloomy colours. These inexpressible sufferings are in reality inexpressible mercies. These souls had deserved Hell, and God wishes to give them Heaven, but in His justice He can only do so after exacting from them a long and painful expiation.

Let us listen to Father Faber on this subject:

"The extreme severity of the punishments of Purgatory is another consideration which leads the mind to contemplate the immense multitude of the saved, and of those saved with very imperfect dispositions, as the only solution of those chastisements, Purgatory goes as near to the unriddling the riddle of the world as any one ordinance of God which can be named. Difficulties are perpetually drifting that way to find their explanation. . . . Now, does it come natural to us to look at all this

system, *this terrible eighth sacrament of fire,* which is the home of those souls whom the seven real sacraments of earth have not been allowed to purify completely, does it come natural to us to look at it all as simply a penal machinery invented for the saints and those most like the saints, to cut away with its vindictive sharpness the little imperfections which come of human frailty? Does not the view at once recommend itself to us that it was an invention of God to multiply the fruit of our Saviour's Passion, that it was intended for the great multitudes who should die in charity with God, but in imperfect charity, and therefore that it is as it were the continuance of deathbed mercies beyond the grave, and that, as such, it throws no uncertain light on the cheering supposition that most Catholics are saved, especially of the poor who suffer and sorrow here?"*

If we were allowed to pierce the mystery and to enter for an instant that world of expiation beyond the grave, what surprises would await us! How many souls we should find there who had been looked upon by all as eternally lost, and who would say to us as they said to Dante when he visited Purgatory:

> "My sins were horrible; but so wide arms
> Hath goodness infinite, that it receives
> All who turn to it."†

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* *The Creator and the Creature.*

† *Purgatory*, canto iii. (Cary's translation).

CHAPTER III

THE NUMBER OF THE ELECT

"I saw a great multitude, which no man could number."—APOCALYPSE.

I.

WE are nearing the end of the modest study we have attempted of Christian immortality, and a question arises in our mind. May we, without presumption, hope that we ourselves and those who are dear to us will one day attain to the wonderful Heaven which God has prepared for His Elect? Have we a real probability of entering into it one day? In other words: Will most of us be saved, or only a few?

We must begin by declaring candidly that neither God nor the Church have given us any solution of this formidable problem. No doubt the truth, made up of unutterable kindness and infinite mercy, would have reassured us; but sin has reduced us to such a state of moral weakness that uncertainty on this point is safer for us, for it inspires us with a fear which is a safeguard to virtue and rich in merit.

Far be it from us to venture to try and lessen this fear.

Neither do we think that such an impres-

sion will be left in the minds of those who read this chapter. Our desire—a most ardent one—is to show that the gates of Heaven having been opened wide to every man by Our Lord Jesus Christ, every one of us may enter, and that he alone who has willed it will be rejected !

II.

To begin with, does not God's glory demand that the number of the elect should be infinitely greater than that of the lost ?

The world of creation, indeed, is a great battlefield, where good and evil wage a mysterious warfare. This warfare is shown by our Sacred Books as beginning in the origin of time, at the very foot of the throne of God. There heavenly spirits rebel against their Creator. To punish them for their ingratitude and pride the Eternal hurls them into the depths of the unfathomable abyss. They fall into it blasted and bruised, but untamed; their soul still retains undiminished its hatred and its pride. Milton was well inspired when he put this horrible apostrophe into the mouth of Lucifer, their chief, immediately after his fall:

" Into what pit thou seest
From what height fall'n, so much the stronger proved
He with His thunder; and till then who knew
The force of those dire arms ? yet not for those

Nor what the potent victor in His rage
Can else inflict, do I repent, or *change*,
Though changed in outward lustre, that fix'd mind
* * * *
Since by fate the strength of Gods
And this empyreal substance cannot fail;
* * * *
We may . . . wage eternal war."*

Yes, hatred still remained to these fallen angels. That was why, since war against God had become impossible, they determined to wage it against His creatures. Thus in the very beginning we see them appear beside the cradle of the human race! Their hatred triumphs, for Adam and Eve revolt against Him who has just created them. And their unhappy descendants remain for thousands of years under the sway of those spirits of evil.

The Son of God became man in order to free us from this domination. But though Jesus Christ, by His life and death, delivered us from the infernal slavery, He did not put an end to the conflict. This conflict—a mystery of mysteries!—is still going on before our eyes. It is of it that I write, and because of it that you read what I have written. Only the vanquished throw doubt on it; they accept their defeat and endeavour afterwards to deny it, in order to hide their present shame and their fear of the disasters to come. But we Christians know that it

* *Paradise Lost*, book i.

will only end when our world is in ruins, when Christ Jesus, in the majesty of His Divine power, descends again on earth to judge all nations. All the phalanxes of heavenly spirits will come in His train to witness His immortal triumph. At that moment we shall realize the full truth of St. Paul's declaration: All things are *yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.**

Cardinal de Bérulle, one of the greatest philosophers of the seventeenth century, whose books won for him the name of the *Apostle of the Mysteries of the Incarnate Word* from Pope Urban VII., has left us the following passage, full of deep meaning:

"God, in the circumference of His works . . . is like an admirable circle which is formed by finishing at the same point from which it started. The Word (Our Lord Jesus Christ) is the termination in which this return is completed. Through Him all things return to the starting-point—to God."†

The fulfilment of the mystery of the Incarnation will be reached when the Son of Man re-enters Heaven, preceded by numberless legions of Angels, and followed by the immense army of the human race. It will then be made manifest that the Son of God

* 1 Cor. iii.

† *De L'Estat et des Grandeurs de Jésus.*

became man, no doubt, because man forms the last link in the chain of beings gifted with intelligence. Christ, on the day of His Incarnation, took hold of one end of this mysterious chain, which started from God in the days of creation; and on the last day of the ages He will bring it back to its starting-point, in order to form an immense circle, or rather an infinite sphere of which God will be the centre, the light, and the life.

Who will not draw the conclusion from this that the number of the Elect in comparison with that of the lost will be not only far greater, but out of all proportion with it? Could we admire God's work so much if half his creatures had only been drawn from nothingness in order to be plunged one day into eternal misery? Would the triumph of His Son be complete if after the great battle He only brought back a small portion of the combatants? It seems to us—and what pain there is in the thought!—that Satan, looking round on the immense multitude which has remained, and will remain for ever beneath his standard, might in the face of Heaven and earth hurl this insulting blasphemy against God: "Thy triumph is not without a shadow, and my defeat is not without glory. Let us count our followers; my hatred has made greater conquests than Thy love. If I did not succeed in reconquering Heaven, at least I have depopulated it!"

And should not we, the Elect of God, be stupefied at the sight of so many of our brethren going forth to eternal misery? Where would be the glory and delight of our great and decisive triumph?

III.

But does not the Gospel in several places give us to understand that only a small number of the human race will enter the kingdom of Heaven? We cannot but remember, on this point, the terrible words of Jesus Christ: *Many are called, but few are chosen.*

We hasten to reply that in the parable which ends with this sentence, so often quoted, the kingdom of Heaven is not directly alluded to, but only the kingdom of the Gospel.

But the best answer we can give to this question is to lay down as clearly as possible the meaning that Jesus Christ attached to the parable. The sentence which sums it up will then appear in its true light, very different to that in which it has appeared to so many souls whom it terrifies.

The scene which we must study takes place in the temple at Jerusalem.

The chief priests and scribes drew near to Jesus, while He was teaching the people, and

said: "By what authority dost Thou do these things?"

*Jesus answered: "The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king who made a marriage for his son. And he sent his servants to call them that were invited to his marriage: and they would not come. Again he sent other servants . . . but they neglected, and went their ways, one to his farm, and another to his merchandize. And the rest laid hands on his servants, and having treated them contumeliously put them to death. But when the king had heard of it, he was angry, and sending his armies, he destroyed those murderers, and burnt their city. Then he saith to his servants: The marriage indeed is ready: but they that were invited were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways; and as many as you shall find, call to the marriage. And his servants going forth into the ways, gathered together all that they found, both bad and good: and the marriage was filled with guests. And the king went in to see the guests, and he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment. And he saith to him: Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a wedding garment? But he was silent. Then the king said to the waiters: Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.**

* St. Matt. xxii.

The King spoken of in this parable is God, and Jesus Christ is the Son for whom He makes a marriage. We know, indeed, that for thousands of years God was preparing the world in general, and the Jewish people in particular, to celebrate the mystical union which the Divine Word willed to come and contract with human nature. He sent first, in the beginning, the Patriarchs, who invited all men to prepare for the coming of the Messias who was to deliver them. But men paid no heed to this invitation. Then God chose for Himself a peculiar people; and His Seers, His Prophets, came to urge the sons of Israel to make themselves worthy to take their places at the Divine banquet when the heavenly Bridegroom should appear. The Jews, blinded by the love of earthly things, despised the Seers, and more than once *killed the Prophets*. These chief priests and scribes, whom Jesus answers in this parable, are worthy to be the sons of those who laid hands on the servants of God and put them to death, who will presently kill the Son of God Himself! But the hour is approaching when the King of kings, being angry, will send the Roman armies, *who will destroy these murderers and burn their city*—that is to say, Jerusalem. Yet God will not forego the royal celebration of the marriage of His Son. Soon fresh servants, no longer Seers and Prophets, but

Apostles, will go forth on the high-roads of the earth, succeeding each other in the streets and market-places, calling all those whom they meet, *both good and bad*, to the marriage feast of Truth. Multitudes will come, amongst whom *only one* will be thrown out of the hall and be unable to take his place at the eternal banquet.

It was after expounding this parable, which contains and sums up in a few lines the whole past and future history of mankind, that Christ turned towards these blinded and malignant Jews who surrounded Him, with this apostrophe, more terrible than a thunderbolt falling on their heads: "Thus, among you, *many have been called* to the marriage feast of the Son of God; but how *few are chosen!*"

How faithfully this prophecy was to be accomplished! Without going back on the past, we cannot help seeing with what stupefying clearness it is being realized every day before our eyes. Where are all the nations which existed in the days of the Gospel? Show us a Phœnician, a Babylonian, a Gaul, a Roman, we only ask you for one! On the other hand, we can show you Israelites in greater numbers than in the days of Solomon! Nineteen centuries ago they were dispersed to the four winds of Heaven, and now it is the whole earth which

they inhabit. Now and then one is converted, and thus enters the *marriage feast*, but there are millions who *will not come*. They go their way, as the Gospel expresses it, *one to his farm*—that is to say, to the fine country place he has purchased; another *to his merchandize*, to the business from which he hopes to extract gold, the gold which he has always coveted; the rest, secretly allied with the enemies of Christ, persecute *His servants, His religious, and His priests*.

Thus the Divine oracle is accomplished.

But when we, the sons of the Gospel, seek in this famous parable some light as to the number of those amongst us who will be admitted to the eternal banquet of the Son of God, what hope will it not awaken in our souls? We, who believe in the Christian idea, are indeed the invited guests, good and bad, found by the Apostles in the high-roads and public places of the world. We have heard God's call, and by Baptism, at the very least, have entered into His mystical house—that is to say, into His Church. We, therefore, are waiting for the coming of the Son of God. He passes, indeed, through the midst of us every day, to call those to eternity whose hour is come. It is the Gospel, let us observe, which says: *The marriage was filled with guests, and only one*

was cast into the exterior darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The unhappy wretch had not *a wedding garment*—that is to say, as St. Gregory explains, that he did not love God.* Why did he remain in the banqueting-hall? No doubt for some unworthy motive, which brought upon him this terrible punishment. As for the others, both *good and bad*, they will be admitted to a seat at the banquet in the heavenly kingdom for all eternity, because they responded to the invitation they received.

Beloved reader, if as you read these lines you are tempted to think that I interpret too liberally a parable which until now you have considered so severe, let me hasten to tell you that Origen, St. Jerome, St. John Chrysostom, St. Hilarion, and many others, have understood and explained it in the same sense.

If you think my interpretation too merciful, let me take you to Calvary, and, showing you the Son of God expiating by His own will on the Cross in the most cruel agony ever known in this world, let me repeat: "Do you believe that a God suffered so much in order to save only the just? You forget what He Himself said, and repeated so often: *I came not to call the just, but sinners.*† Let me take you next to the foot of the thousands of altars on which every morning Christ

* Homily xxxviii. † St. Matt. ix. 13.

suffers and dies, and ask you: "Do you not know that a single Mass is sufficient to wash away all the stains of the earth?"

Besides, if we take in their order all the Gospel parables which treat of the kingdom of Heaven, it cannot be denied that they all convey the impression of the great number of the Elect.

In one the kingdom of Heaven is compared to a field in which the householder sows good seed, and the enemy cockle. The good seed represents the Elect, and the cockle the Lost. But all know that in a cultivated field the proportion of cockle can in no way be compared to the wheat.

In another a fisherman draws out of his net good fish and bad, the first signifying the Elect, the latter the Lost. Now, we need only go down to the banks of one of our rivers, or the shore of one of our lakes, or go on board a fisherman's barque, and count the number of fish they throw away. One or two, perhaps, at the most, compared to a hundred which they keep.

Bergier wrote: "If the parables of the Gospel may be taken as proofs, we ought to conclude from them that it is the *great number*, and not the *small number*, that will be saved."*

* *Traité de la Vraie Religion*, vol. x., p. 355.

IV.

But might not this doctrine of the great number of the Elect be of a nature to weaken the efforts and lessen the sacrifices which so many faithful believers are prepared to make in order to insure the conquest of Heaven? Why, it may be said, this incessant struggle against our fallen nature, this flight from the world, this renunciation of its pleasures and ambitions if in order to save our souls it is sufficient to abstain from crime?

The Gospel, or rather our Lord Jesus Christ, answers this objection.

A man, going into a far country, called his servants, and delivered to them his goods. And to one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one, to every one according to his proper ability: and immediately he took his journey. . . .

After a long time the lord of those servants came, and reckoned with them. And he that had received the five talents coming, brought other five talents. . . .

His lord said to him: "Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

And he also that had received the two talents came and said: "Lord, thou deliveredst two talents to me, behold I have gained other two."

His lord said to him: "Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

But he that had received the one talent, came and said: "Lord . . . I went and hid my talent in the earth: behold here thou hast that which is thine."

*And his lord answering, said to him: "Wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sow not . . . thou oughtest therefore to have committed my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received my own with usury. Take ye away therefore the talent from him . . . and the unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."**

We see, therefore, that each one of us will be judged not only for *what he has done*, but still more according to *what he has received*. For we are those servants in the parable to whom the Master—that is, God—has entrusted what belongs to him. We must make what we have received bear fruit, and it must bear fruit in the measure of what we have received. This is an absolute law for one and all of us. He, therefore, that has received only one talent, if he can bring back two, will enter into the joy of his Lord in Heaven; but of him who has received five talents far more will be required.

* St. Matt. xxv.

You on whom God has showered His gifts and, I dare to say, has overwhelmed with His benefits, take the scales, and put into one side what God has done for you, into the other what you have done for God. It is not I, it is the Gospel, it is Jesus Christ Himself who tells you that the weight on each side must be equal. The Christian family into which He caused you to be born; the holy and admirable mother through whose lips and heart be imprinted His name on your forehead and His love in your soul; the religious education He bestowed on your youth; the atmosphere of virtue in which He caused you to grow up; the word of truth with which He fed your understanding; all the graces by which He sustained and uplifted your will; the mysterious desires by which He raised your heart on high; the Divine Sacraments in which He became your light, your strength, your life—all this is the weight on the side of God. What is there on your side? How much does it weigh? What have you done? What are you doing for God?

Will you then dare to say: "When you preach to me that God's mercies are infinite you give me the right to diminish my efforts, and to cease my struggles and sacrifices"? Not so. The only conclusion to be drawn from all that has been said is that you yourselves are among those servants of the Gospel

who have received five talents, and that if at this moment you were called before the Master it would be impossible for you to present Him with the double of what was given to you.

At least, be kind and merciful to those of your brethren on whom the Master has only bestowed one talent, and often even less. How many of them have only received the grace of Baptism! Could faith exist of itself in these disinherited souls? By the circumstances of their birth they are placed in surroundings where God is never mentioned except with blasphemy, nor His Church except to calumniate her. What chance have they of knowing what religion meant, or of observing its holy laws? Is there any real difference between these unfortunate beings who live beside us, whose soul is obscured by the senses, whose mind is riveted to matter, who have no higher thought than how to gain their daily bread, is there any real difference, I say, between these, who have never understood the Gospel of Christ, and the infidels of Asia or Africa who have never heard of it?

Yes, a difference exists, I have no fear in asserting it; an immense one! *These men have been baptized*, and by that fact have entered *the divine marriage feast* and become the brothers of Jesus Christ and heirs of Heaven. Ah! Christian Baptism is a great,

a sublime reality! It is a public and official act, a contract solemnly entered into between earth and Heaven, between man and God, in virtue of which a poor son of Adam becomes *a son of God, ut filii Dei fierent*, says the Gospel.* God never annuls this act, God is never the first to break this contract. Man himself may renounce it, but he cannot commit this criminal folly without knowing it and willing it.

Have they really renounced their Baptism, these unfortunate beings who never understood its meaning and value? Who would dare to assert it? Bring the priest to their side at the hour of death, and all or nearly all will receive the last Sacraments with dispositions that will astonish you. Who would dare to hold them responsible for the crime of those who rooted out the practice of Christian faith from the midst of our population? Ah! it was an immense crime, and God's hand will for ever be heavy on those who are the true culprits. But when evil comes from those above them, how should the working classes resist it for long?

CHRIST AND THE PEOPLE!

Who can express the tenderness and mercy of the former for the ignorance and weakness of the latter? *I have compassion on the*

* St. John i.

multitude! This cry, which fell from the lips, or rather from the heart of the God-Man, has come down to us through the centuries, and it will go on through all time till it resounds in eternity.

However great the indifference (it would be more true to say the ignorance) in which these poor workmen, the disinherited ones of the earth, *crucified by labour,* to whom the term of *multitude* is applied, live and too often die, we cannot resign ourselves to despair of their salvation. We have read the Gospel too often and looked at the Cross too much for that!

If you are still tempted to be scandalized at such a wide conception of the Divine mercy, let me use a last argument: Suppose it were you whom the Divine Providence had left to live and die thus without the means of salvation, without examples of virtue, without any of the helps of religion, having received Baptism in your cradle, and made your first Communion, alas! without understanding and, humanly speaking, without the possibility of perseverance, would you be a better Christian than they? Well, then, extend to your unhappy brethren the mercy you would then have needed yourself.

Pope Pius IX., in a letter addressed to the Italian Bishops in the year 1863, wrote thus: "You know as we do that

those who are in invincible ignorance, but who follow the natural law, and who, being accustomed to obey God, lead an honourable and upright life, may, by the Divine light and grace attain to eternal life. For God, who sees into the depths of minds and hearts and thoughts and habits, judges according to His goodness and clemency. He does not punish with eternal sufferings those who have not been wilfully guilty."

But then, you will say, their state is preferable to our own! Will not God's judgments be infinitely less severe for them than for ourselves?

Servant who received five talents, can you really envy the lot of those who received but one, and often even less than that? Do you think them happy in living as they do? Their understanding is in darkness, their heart in the mire, and their soul, unawakened, is chained in a dull torpor which resembles death. Their life here below is wretched indeed! As for their reward beyond the grave, will it not be proportional to their merits on earth? Jesus said: *In my Father's house there are many mansions.* Between one of the Elect and another, even in Heaven, there is as much, and perhaps even more, distance than between one man and another on earth. For in Heaven by the side of princes there

will also be simple subjects. Would you then dare to complain that God caused you to be born on the steps of a heavenly throne, on which it only depends on yourself to be seated for all eternity, rising to it through those intellectual joys and that moral greatness which belong on earth to every true Christian?

No, do not complain that even in this world you are already among those specially favoured by God. Your portion is in every way the best. Tremble, rather, lest it should be taken from you; or better still, redouble your fervour so that such a misfortune may never overtake you in life.

We who trace with a hesitating pen, but conviction in our hearts, these lines on the *Infinite Mercy* of our Saviour, esteem ourselves happy in being able to end this chapter with a page from an author respected and loved by all; a page which sums up all we think and have tried to say with an authority to which we cannot lay claim:

"We are speaking of what we do not know. But it is at least allowable to put all these considerations in opposition to those which, justly or not, give us hard, and to our weakness, dishonourable thoughts of God. They are not doctrines. They are not certainties. They are inferences, they are hopes, they are speculations, which

are surely more in harmony with what we know of our most righteous and most compassionate Creator than the opposite view. Even if we are wrong, which the last day alone will show, we shall be better men for having tried to think such thoughts of God as get Him more honour among men, and more love from ourselves."*

CHAPTER IV

THE SUPREME HOPE

"We are certain not to lose any of those we love, when we love them in Him whom we can never lose."
—St. Augustine.

I.

God is sovereign justice, therefore we have everything to fear from His judgments; but He is also infinite mercy, and we may therefore hope everything from His goodness.

"Goodness is the foundation of august natures.
God fashioned the heart of the just out of one virtue,
As He made the cupola of heaven from a single sapphire."

If we magnify the goodness in our own heart till it reaches infinite proportions we

* Father Faber, *The Creator and the Creature.*

may then form some idea of the heart of God.

Therefore if we ought to fear everything for ourselves in the great and unique affair of our eternal destiny, we are permitted to hope everything for others.

Whatever may have been the end of those whom we saw depart for eternity, we should never despair of their salvation. Does not the Church tell us that the *property of God*, which distinguishes Him from created beings, more even than His power and glory, is *always to have pity and to save?* *

II.

If our dear departed had kept their faith during life, or if at least, during the last days of their exile, they implored pardon of Heaven, why should we doubt the salvation of their soul? Is not the God before whom they appeared the God of mercy who on the Cross promised Heaven to a highway robber, crucified by His side? Those for whom we weep had done much less during life, and much more at the hour of death.

Indeed, we need only listen to our heart in order to believe in their entrance into immortal happiness. A voice from the depths of our soul assures us that those we love so dearly are happy, that they regret

* Office of the Dead.

nothing in life, that they left the earth because their task was ended, and that our own chief pre-occupation should be to finish our own nobly, so that we may deserve to go and rejoin them.

Therefore when we go with a heavy heart, cast down in soul, to kneel by the tomb of those we revere and love, let us raise our heads and look *Above*, beyond the land of exile, to that country of true life and happiness of which they have crossed the threshold, and repeat the words:

> "The corpse is calm below our knee;
> Its spirit, bright before Thee.
> Between them, worse than either, we
> Without the rest or glory."*

But if those for whom we weep are so unfortunate as to have allowed themselves to be carried far away from God, and if death has overtaken them in these distant regions, alas! we have only too much reason to fear what their eternity may be.

But this fear must not be allowed to lead us to despair. We cannot do better than imitate the Church, the mother of souls, who never despairs because she knows both the weakness of man and the goodness of God. The Church indeed has never despaired of the salvation of any man, with one exception: Judas. Of him Jesus said: *It*

* Elizabeth Browning.

would be better for him if he had not been born. For him therefore there is no hope. But how great was his guilt! The companion of the Son of God, one of His chosen Apostles, who beheld the paralytics walk, the blind recover their sight, and Lazarus come forth from the tomb; who assisted at the Last Supper and received Communion from Christ's own hand; who betrayed Him and delivered Him to death for a miserable sum of money. Yet notwithstanding the many graces he slighted, the number of crimes he committed, the most weighty commentators of the Holy Scriptures assure us that if the deicide Apostle fell into eternal misery, it was less for having betrayed the Son of God and delivered Him to His enemies than for rejecting the pardon which was offered to him.

If at the moment when His executioners were leading Christ to Golgotha, and when, according to an early tradition, the Apostle who was His murderer saw Him pass by, pale and tottering beneath the weight of His Cross, if at this moment, we say, Judas had fallen at the feet of His Master, his pardon was certain. He would now without any doubt be one of the Twelve, who after converting the world, reign and will reign for ever as princes in Heaven. But the unhappy wretch! after closing his heart against love, closed it also against repentance.

The damnation of Judas, indeed, is a powerful demonstration of the truth we have already had occasion to assert in the course of this book: *that Hell is the hatred of God.* Those certainly go to Hell as to their centre, who leave this world hating the God whom they first ignored, and then denied, sold, and persecuted. These unhappy ones have committed the crime which Scripture calls *the sin against the Holy Ghost,* the crime of which Christ said: *This sin shall not be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come!*

It is difficult to explain how creatures can be found on earth miserable enough to be capable of such depths of folly, of descending into such an abyss of perversity, but, alas! it is so. Hatred of God, hatred of our good God, exists in this world. Judas is not hated, Nero is not hated, the human monsters who have committed the most horrible crimes are not hated. When a criminal whose hands are imbued with the blood of his fellow creatures mounts the scaffold, he is not hated, he is pitied and looked upon with compassion. But when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, comes down on earth to bring us Truth, Liberty, and Love; Jesus Christ, whose hands are only raised to heal the sick, to pardon the guilty, to bless all those who suffer; Jesus Christ, who willed to be fastened to an infamous gibbet,

and to die on it in order to expiate our crimes; Jesus Christ, who lives in the midst of us still to cure our evils and show us Heaven beyond our sad horizon—there are men who pursue Him with implacable hatred, who in their rage at being unable to reach Him turn and vent their fury against all those who love and adore Him! Oh! this is something horrible, inexplicable, and irreparable! These unhappy wretches afford us a vision of Hell, and Hell for eternity. For God could only prevent them from hating Him in one way—by annihilating them. But God made their soul immortal; and His justice would always be opposed to His goodness granting them this last benefit, which would indeed be a triumph for their criminal hate.

To work, then, since it is your wicked will, enemies of God, blasphemers of Christ, persecutors of His religion! Close our churches, throw down our crosses, slander our priests and nuns, expel our monks from their houses of prayer, snatch from their hands the alms with which they were about to make a home for the orphan and save the aged poor from dying of hunger; proscribe the Gospel and the Catechism in your schools, remove the crucifix from the dying man's bedside, force the priest to the profanation of his holy calling in the barracks, and, above all, destroy the Christian faith in the souls of our children.

Even as we who adore the God of the Gospel labour to strengthen His love in our hearts, so you, His persecutors, labour to strengthen the hatred with which you are inspired against Him. Death will soon render this hatred immortal, and your eternal destiny is contained in this line: *It would have been better for them if they had never been born !*

These last thoughts bring back to our mind a terrible tragedy related to us a few years back by a priest who had witnessed it, or rather had been an involuntary actor in it. We attest, on our honour, that the fact is authentic and exactly told.

It happened in a country town in the east of France. A fire had just broken out when the night was nearly over. The population, startled out of its sleep, hastened from every quarter. A young priest in the midst of the crowd encouraged the people by his example to use all their efforts against the fire. But a man appeared presently on the scene well known to all. For years his impiety had made him a celebrity. He was a schoolmaster, led away by politics. The very idea of God exasperated him; the sight of a church or a cross caused him to blaspheme ! He could not contain himself when he saw this priest mingling in the ranks and giving an example of labour and zeal to all. He rushed towards him, his features con-

vulsed with fury, horrible blasphemies on his lips. . . . But, terrifying sight ! at the very moment when a horrible blasphemy issued from his lips the unfortunate man sank heavily to the ground. Already his body lay motionless in the dust, but his head, agitated by a convulsive movement, kept rising every moment and falling back violently on the ground. It seemed as though some invisible hand forced him to salute God's representative, and at the same time crushed the mouth and bruised the lips which had poured forth such frightful blasphemies ! The horrified crowd did not venture to approach, but the priest sprang forward . . . he was dead !

What a scene ! The night, the terrified crowd, the sinister glare of the fire—it might have been evoked from Hell ! And was not the impious man struck down by the Divine anger in order to stop his blasphemy, like a vision of the damned ?

But, Heaven be praised ! it is only a very small number who are thus possessed with hatred of God. With most even of those who live in forgetfulness of their religious duties. it is the result of the ignorance in which they were brought up; often, too, of the hard oppression of labour, of business, of poverty, of sorrow ! Far from hating God, they retain for Him at the bottom of

their heart a respect and fear which is not devoid of love. "We must have a thorough acquaintance," wrote Father Faber, "with a man's peculiar turn of mind, the bent of his disposition, the circumstances of his past life, and, most of all, his early education before we are at all in a condition to form an estimate of what his guilt is in the sight of God. . . . The heart is the jewel which He covets for His crown, and if the heart which we do not see is better than the actions which we see, God be praised, for then the world is a trifle less dismal than it seems."* It is for these souls, forgetful, but not wilfully perverse, that the Divine mercy holds its immense treasures in reserve.

"But we make His love too narrow
By false limits of our own;
And we magnify His strictness
With a zeal He will not own."†

III.

We have already said, and we wish to repeat it again, many theologians are of opinion that the soul, at the moment of crossing the eternal threshold, sees itself for an instant enveloped in a supernatural light which, like a flash, reveals to it all the truths which are taught by the Gospel. "In the

* *The Creator and the Creature.*
† Father Faber, *Hymns Selected.*

life of Coudren there is a very remarkable passage, urging on us the duty of thanksgiving to God for the graces He bestows on the dying, inasmuch as *His compassion for them is inexplicable, and He seems to distribute His favours to them all the more willingly, because they are hardly now in danger of profaning them.* Beautiful thought! Oh, how much of the beauty of God's love is gathered round the dying bed! We grant that it is unknown ground; but because mercy is so much needed then . . . and because God is such a God as we know Him well to be, we boldly claim all that unknown land of Catholic death-beds for the simple sovereignty of the Divine compassion. That hour may explain many inexplicable salvations."*

Alas! what harm Jansenism did to the Church, and especially in France, by speaking only of *the inflexible justice* of God. It was more hurtful, more fatal to our country, than Protestantism to Germany! Christ on the Cross, His arms extended, His hands opened out to pour down His Blood and His pardon upon us, was represented by the Jansenists with His hands contracted, His arms raised to Heaven, to call down the thunderbolt of His Father to punish the crimes of men.

Whenever they could lay their hands on a church, they engraved on its frontispiece

* Father Faber, *The Creator and the Creature.*

inscriptions such as the following, which we have often read in our youth above the entrance door of the churches in the neighbourhood of Port Royal, the sanctuary so much loved and regretted, as we know, by that ill-omened sect: *Mortals, tremble before the threshold of the sanctuary!*

If the mere aspect of the sanctuary were to make one tremble, what of the aspect of Him who dwelt in it? And of what avail to come to His feet, to weep for your sins and implore His graces? You were saved or you were damned gratuitously by an eternal decree which nothing could change! Aberration and mystery! These men who knew so much did not know the Gospel! It might be supposed that they had never read it! Rather, they had read and re-read it, but without understanding, for pride had hardened their heart, and the Gospel is a book which can only be understood by the heart.

Tremble before the God of the Gospel? Why should we? Did He ever cause sinners to tremble in the course of His mortal life? On the contrary, He wished to be their friend, He went forward to meet them, He mixed with them, so much so that He scandalized the Pharisees and even the people! We know His predilection for sinners. He declared it Himself: *He came to seek and save that which was lost.* The more

guilty a soul the more He inclined to it. He liked to represent Himself as a Shepherd who left the ninety-nine faithful sheep in the desert to hasten in search of the hundredth one which had strayed, or rather which had fled from the fold.

O Jesus, Thou art indeed gentle and merciful! The Christian people were happily inspired when they called Thee the good God! Although when I behold Thee hushing the unchained elements with Thy sovereign power, miraculously feeding the multitude in the desert, dazzling Thy Apostles with the splendour of Thy glory on Thabor, stupefying the crowd by Thy power when Thou raisest from the dead those whose bodies have already begun to decay, I believe and I adore. Yet my flesh shivers and terror invades my soul. I seem to myself so little and Thou so great! I feel myself so guilty, and Thou seemest to me so Divine. I am ready to fall on my knees at Thy feet, my head in the dust, and to cry with St. Peter in the Gospel: *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!** But when Thou layest Thy hand on the lepers; when Thou seatest Thyself at the table of sinners, those lepers of the soul, far more repulsive in Thy sight than the former; when Thou shieldest the woman taken in adultery, and sufferest the woman who was a sinner to bathe Thy

* St. Luke v. 8.

feet with her tears, and cover them with kisses; when in Thy agony in the garden, even then Thou callest the traitor who delivers Thee to Thine enemies: *My friend!* when Thou prayest to Thy Father on Calvary for those who crucify Thee and dost promise Heaven to the dying thief who only a moment before had insulted Thee—oh! then my eyes fill with tears! For I feel that in spite of my perversity and my vices Thou lovest me still, and that I may love Thee as a father, a brother, the gentlest and most tender of brothers. I cannot then doubt that those whom I love Thou lovest also, as much as I do, more than I do. If, then, I pray to Thee, entreat Thee for them, Thou wilt have compassion on my tears, and, however many and great the faults they have committed, Thou wilt not permit them to fall away far from me into eternal misery!

IV.

Catholic theology develops for us here a glorious prospect. We know, indeed, through it that God has neither past nor future, but that He sees all things at a glance, as He knows all in a single thought. Therefore, at that awful moment when the soul is placed between the life which ends and eternity which begins, in that second which includes its whole past and contains already its whole

future, when, trembling, dazzled, aghast, it listens for the coming of that irrevocable sentence from the depths of eternity which will decide whether it is saved or lost, at that instant God sees not only what the soul has done, but also what has been done for it, and, unutterable mystery of love, *all that will be done for it in the future!*

Yes, those prayers which we shall offer to Heaven when presently sorrow descends upon us, and we find consolation only on our knees; the tears which we shall shed, the grief which breaks our hearts and which we shall offer up for them—this is already under the eyes of that God who only seeks to pardon. The poor whom we help, the sick whom we visit, the orphans we take in in His name, God sees them already, and their petitions rise up to Him. God contemplates already those masses which the Church will offer up in successive years, and the Blood of His Son mingles with our tears, His Divine agony is joined to our human agony, the voice of the great Victim uniting with Its own all our earthly voices, cries to Heaven: *Lord, pardon this soul so dearly loved; when it forgot Thee, even when it offended Thee, it knew not what it did!*

If, having never sufficiently considered the subject, this doctrine seems to you new and even strange, I will show the prayers which

the Church offers up to God, on behalf of all the souls which have passed into eternity.

According to you their lot is fixed, irrevocably fixed, and no prayer can change it? In that case how can the Church repeat a year, a century even, after their death: *Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory, deliver the souls of all the faithful departed from the pains of Hell and from the deep pit. . . . Let the standard-bearer, St. Michael, bring them into the holy light. . . . We offer Thee, O Lord, a sacrifice of praise and prayers; accept them on behalf of the souls we commemorate this day, and make them pass, O Lord, from death to life.**

You can only explain these prayers by this truth: At the moment when God was judging these souls He looked and listened, and He saw and heard all which would be done or said one day, and even to the end of time, to disarm His justice and obtain for them His pardon and Heaven.

It would, besides, be impossible to understand in any other sense the formal teaching of the Church, which is as follows: During the long ages which preceded the coming of the Son of God souls were pardoned and saved in view of the merits of the Incarnation.

"Before men were able to lower their eyes to the Crib and raise them to Calvary; before the sun of Redemption became visible to them in this humble valley of our exile,

* Offertory of the Mass for the Dead.

they could already be led by its light and quickened by its heat. Why? Because God the Father, from the summit of the eternal hills, beheld already the prayers, the sufferings, the virtues, the merits of His only-begotten Son, who was to take flesh in order to save the world. Was it not thus that the blessed Virgin, who was to be the Mother of this only-begotten Son, was preserved from all stain in her own conception, because, the Church tells us, God considered beforehand His Son dying on the Cross?"*

We might bring innumerable witnesses in confirmation of this merciful doctrine of the efficacy of our prayers to merit, long even after they have disappeared from the earth, the eternal salvation of our beloved dead. On this point certain Fathers of the Church have gone so far as to astonish us. We will content ourselves with transcribing the page which follows:

A Queen of France,† a devout and fervent Catholic, was struck in her heart and soul by a cruel and terrible blow. Her eldest son, the presumptive heir to the throne, met a sudden and terrible death in a common carriage accident. "Ah! tell me at least that my son is in Heaven!" was the first cry of the unfortunate mother. A few days afterwards she remembered the Père de

* Père Blot, *Au Ciel on se reconnait*, p. 98.
† Marie-Amélie.

Ravignan, whom she looked upon not merely as an eminent preacher, but as a saint, and caused these few lines to be written to him: "Tell me, you who speak so wisely, have we everything to fear, or may we hope everything from the mercy of God?"

The holy Religious answered by the letter you are about to read, and in which the reader will find an epitome of all that we have asserted:

"The letter you have done me the honour of writing to me was brought to me only a few moments ago.

"I am deeply touched at your sending me word; I did not deserve such a proof of extreme kindness in return for a duty fulfilled, a feeble expression of the inmost feeling of my soul.

"A mother's grief is the most sacred and venerable of all sorrows; and we must believe it to be the one which has most power to touch the heart of God. We cannot, it is true, penetrate the secrets of His mercy; we can neither know nor declare what takes place in the last moments of a cruel and mysterious agony; but Christians as we are, placed under the law of hope no less than of faith and love, we should upraise ourselves without ceasing from the depths of our affliction to the thought of the infinite goodness of the Saviour. No barrier, no impossibility, is placed here below between

grace and the soul as long as a breath of life remains. We must, therefore, always hope, and continue in humble and persevering prayer. We cannot tell how far it may be heard. Great saints and great doctors have gone great lengths in speaking of the powerful efficacy of prayers for dearly-loved souls, whatever may have been their end. We shall one day know these inexpressible marvels of the Divine mercy; we must never cease imploring it with the deepest confidence."

No, *let us never cease from imploring God with the deepest confidence* for the salvation of those we love, *whatever may have been their end*. The prayers which we offer up for their souls, the alms we bestow on those who suffer, the good works we do in remembrance of them, will have the same power before God to obtain for them the grace of forgiveness as when these beloved souls were still beside us in the battle of life.

If we were once truly convinced of this, what would we not do?

Let us, then, often repeat to ourselves in order to encourage us in this holy hope that these souls, so dearly loved, will not remain to all eternity far from us and far from Heaven, unless we have been wanting both in love for them and in trust in God!

Ah! how many religious vocations have owed their birth to this truth, understood and felt

by generous souls. There is an austere and compelling sweetness in the resolve, at the thought of the beloved one snatched away without warning before the judgment-seat of God: "I will sacrifice my life, but I will save him for eternity!"

V.

If those who have left us lived in the practice of the faith and fell asleep in the love of Jesus Christ, it would be doing an injury to the justice of God to doubt of their salvation; it would be contrary to our idea of His goodness to believe that they are kept back from Heaven for years and years cruelly expiating their offences. But is there nothing more that we can do for those we so dearly love?

Oh! there is, blessed hope! We can increase the happiness they enjoy in Heaven!

The essential happiness of the saints is undoubtedly the possession of God, and nothing can add to this happiness, since it is infinite for the very least of the Elect; but their accidental happiness—that is to say, that which comes from creatures—may go on increasing till the day of the Resurrection.* Did not our Saviour Himself make known to us that *the conversion of a sinner brought great joy to Heaven?* †

Yes, let us have no doubt about it, since

* St. Thomas, *prima pars*, Q. LXII.

† St. Luke xv. 20.

absolute Justice has willed it: *The works of man follow him beyond the grave.** Not only the works he has completed, but those also which he has begun, of which he has laid the foundations or only sown the seed. These works, either by the results which spring from them, the effect they produce, the good or evil which they cause, will follow him to the throne of God, to increase his merits and his glory day by day; or else, alas! they will pursue him to the depths of the eternal abyss, to increase his guilt and his suffering.

For example, the unhappy mortal on whom God bestowed great mental gifts, and who only used them in order to write what he knew to be a bad book, will feel his shame and sorrow growing as the souls who are lost through his fault come and rejoin him in hell to hate and curse him to his face. From which it is manifest that to write a bad book is one of the greatest crimes a man can commit. To kill a fellow creature, to embrue our hands in human blood—oh! this is horrible indeed! And human justice punishes this crime with a penalty which is in some sort eternal, since it puts him to death who commits it. Yet what is it to kill a body which is in any case condemned to die compared to his crime who kills a soul, and in so doing hurls this soul into never-ending misery!

But, by virtue of this same law, every-

* Apocalypse.

thing good which is done on earth, all the good works which the souls that have entered Heaven have left behind, rises incessantly towards the throne of God, and each new merit corresponds for them with a new degree of glory and happiness.

Delight, then, in doing good in memory and in the name of those dear ones who have gone to eternity. Use the riches they have left you, which they spent their life in amassing, and to which perhaps they were too much attached, to give bread to the poor, help to the sick, shelter to the homeless. Every alms bestowed thus by your hand will become a fresh pearl added to their immortal crown. Sometimes you cover the place of their burial with marble, bronze and gold, but do you not know that all these magnificent tokens of your affection, though they may soothe your sorrow a little, are quite useless to them, and that the merest trifle given in their name to the beggar on the road will profit them more than all these costly monuments ?

If their life has been taken up with charitable or religious undertakings, which they founded perhaps, endeavour to make them prosper. God will give them in return for the fruits of truth and virtue which these works bring forth a harvest of glory and happiness in Heaven.

In the ages of faith people founded a

hospital, a monastery, or a church, beside the tomb of a dear departed one! It was a sublime thought! Thus indeed should one love beyond the grave!

Lastly, are we not ourselves, very often, their work, so to say? the sons and daughters of their soul? their companions in the battle of this life? their betrothed for eternity? Did not they give us to God, keep us for Him, or bring us back to Him? If so, we increase their merits by becoming better, and they may say to us in truth from their high place in Heaven, what St. Paul wrote formerly to his converts at Philippi: *Therefore, my dearly beloved brethren, and most desired, my joy and my crown: so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.... Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever of good fame . . . think on these things.**

Thus we shall assure our own salvation, thus we shall increase their happiness, thus we shall draw nearer to them each day, until the hour unknown to us, but already marked out by God, when we shall leave this land of exile and fly ourselves to be near them in this divine, unknown state *which the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived,* and which in the poverty of our earthly language we have called

CHRISTIAN IMMORTALITY.

* Epistle to the Philippians iv.

EPILOGUE

O CHRIST JESUS, sovereign Master of time and eternity, I venture timidly to lay these humble pages at Thy feet! In the very first years of my priesthood I conceived the desire of writing them.

This Immortality of which Thou camest to bring us the certainty in the ever-blessed years of Thy earthly life appeared to me so ideally beautiful! The Heaven to which Thou didst reascend on the day of Thy Ascension seemed to me so glorious! The eternal happiness which Thou didst go to prepare for those of us, who passing through this world, believed in Thy Word and observed Thy Law, held such intoxicating delights in store for us!

I wished to tell of it, to make it understood by so many of my fellow-creatures who were wearing themselves out in a senseless undertaking. *Travellers of a day in this land where they weep*, they waste all the strength of the body, all the powers of the mind, all the treasures of the heart, in a vain endeavour to construct *permanent dwellings* here below. And for whom are these dwellings? When night comes they

must cross the dark threshold from which no man returns! The earth disappears behind them, and in front of them, through their own fault, the gates of Heaven remain closed. Oh! unfortunate mortals!

In order to speak to them with eloquence of that Immortality which means everything to man, and to oblige them to turn their gaze towards that eternal world of which we may truly say: *Each one of us will enter it to-morrow!* I thought it would be sufficient to let the thoughts and enthusiasm which fill my own heart overflow. Alas! now that these pages lie before me my soul is sad and discouraged. They seem so cold, so colourless, so wanting in power!

It is this sense of the weakness of his work which brings the worker to Thy feet. May Thy blessing rest on it, O my God, and bring to this book the only power I desire for it: that of doing good to the souls of those who read it.

May it teach those who are happy enough to believe already, to believe more firmly, so that their thoughts may turn more and more to that *Life Beyond* which is the only object worthy of our efforts and ambition.

May it open the eyes of those whom an unbelieving age has robbed of the Faith, to the incomparable beauty of the Christian idea. When they have once said: *This is*

fine! the day is not far distant on which they will say: *This is true!*

But I beseech Thee even more earnestly, most good and all-powerful Master, to bless this humble book in order that it may speak to the hearts of those who *suffer and weep*. Great is their number, and deep is their sorrow! But this truth which Thou broughtest to our earth is so Divine and holy that it cannot enter into the heart of man without bringing light, hope, and peace along with *it*!

APPENDIX

A SOUL WHICH COMES BACK TO ASK FOR PRAYERS

The following story was published in the "Messenger of Mary Immaculate," at Poitiers. We insert it because we had the happiness of knowing Father Matthew Lecomte during his lifetime, and were also acquainted with the nun of Jerusalem mentioned in it.

"Father Matthew Lecomte died in the spring of 1887 at Jerusalem. . . . He was an enterprising and energetic man, and he devoted the last years of his life, after the expulsions of 1880, to the foundation of a convent of his order at Jerusalem, on the very spot where the first martyr—the deacon St. Stephen—shed his blood for Jesus Christ. This convent is now celebrated everywhere, on account of its Biblical studies.

"He made a journey to France, at the beginning of the same year, for the benefit of his pious work, and on his return to Jerusalem he was soon obliged to take to his bed at the French hospital in the town, in

the midst of the exercises of an ecclesiastical retreat.

"He was never to rise from it again.

"A French nun watched by his bedside to nurse him. We will not give her name as she is still living. She did everything that she could for him, but could not prevail against his malady which grew daily worse and worse.

"At the approach of death the Father became greatly alarmed at the thought of the account he must render to God. The nun reminded him in vain of his Apostolic labours, his life devoted to good works, the conversions he had brought about.

"'My daughter,' he said, in a voice that was almost indistinguishable, 'it is not sufficient to do *good works* in order to please God, they must also be done with *such a pure intention!* .... Oh! when I am no more pray much for me!'

"She promised that she would. But his fears continued, and she added:

"'Yes, I will pray very much: *besides, if you need it, come and tell me so,* and I will pray still more.'

"'My child,' the Father answered with a faint smile, '*we do not return thus from the other world.*'

"'Ask it of God. But in any case I promise you to leave nothing undone by which I may help you to enter Heaven.'

"Father Lecomte died a few hours afterwards, and was buried with much honour in an old vault, discovered during the excavations under St. Stephen's Convent.

"The nun prayed during some weeks for the departed priest; then, absorbed by her occupations, she forgot him.

"One day she was working in her room when she suddenly heard an appalling noise; she noticed a strange, unpleasant smell like sulphur and smoke, and an imploring voice, which she recognized at once as that of the dead Religious, addressed her in these words:

"'*My daughter! oh! pray for me. I suffer horribly.*'

"And gradually the smell faded away.

"A fortnight later the same phenomena rccurred, but less intense. The deceased declared that he had experienced relief from the *prayers,* Communions, rosaries, penances, and other good works performed by the nun, and he added:

"'Thank you, my daughter, your charity has helped me; your prayers were like an abundant dew which fell on the flames and tempered their violence. . . . Go to the Superior of the convent which I founded, and ask him for a *novena of masses,* in order to c omplete my deliverance.'

"She delivered the message without delay. Father Paul Meunier, who received it,

listened, without any outward sign of his feeling on the subject, to the strange story, but as he conducted her politely to the entrance door where he took leave of her, he made up his mind that it was a *hallucination*. After her departure, however, remembering how fully persuaded she had seemed of the truth of the story, that her common sense was well known, and that she was incapable of an untruth, he said to himself:

"'I will say the nine masses. Even if the apparition was a delusion, Father Lecomte will have the benefit of them.'

"On the following day, *without saying a word to anyone*, he began the novena.

"At the close of the ninth day the Religious of the community returned to their cells to take their night's rest. An excellent lay-brother, very downright and active, and not at all inclined to be imaginative, heard a knock at his door.

"'Come in,' he said.

"He was stupefied when he saw Father Matthew Lecomte, radiant and overflowing with happiness, enter the cell! The deceased advanced towards him smiling, looking just as he did in his lifetime, and asked him for news of the convent:

"'Father, we are all well, but you left a great gap behind you.'

"'Courage,' he replied. 'I am now

going up to Heaven. I shall be more useful to you there than here.'

"With these words he affectionately squeezed the hand of the Religious—whose name we withhold, because he also is still alive—with such vigour that for more than a whole day afterwards the latter felt the effects of it. Then he walked back to the door, passed through it and closed it after him. Although the brother opened it again immediately, he saw and heard nothing; the night was profoundly still.

"Much scared, he ran off to his Superior, to whom he recounted what had happened with visible signs of emotion, as may readily be understood. The Superior *compared the dates of the two apparitions which agreed so completely,* and the *declarations of the two witnesses,* who had not met, and whose entire good faith is *above suspicion.*

"A few months later he himself related all these details at Lyons; we heard them from his own mouth, and they excited much remark at Jerusalem.

"In the year 1900 we had the great consolation of making the journey to Palestine, and we took care not to leave the Holy City without questioning the hospital nun and the Dominican brother. They both repeated the story we have just recounted, with perfect simplicity, and without the slightest hesitation."

THE PROVIDENTIAL INTERPOSITION OF A DEPARTED SOUL

(*From a Protestant Newspaper.*)

A few years ago the "New York Herald" related the following facts on the authority of the hero of the story.

We see here by what mysterious interpositions Providence sometimes removes the barriers which separate the world of matter from the world of spirit, in order to bring about the salvation of a soul.

This is the story, very simply told :

"I am a secular priest in London, and my parish is very large and very thickly inhabited. I have two curates, and the presbytery where we all live together adjoins the chapel. We know most of our parishioners personally, but the population is always changing, and it is impossible to know them all.

"On Saturday, November 3, 1888, I had had a heavier day than usual, and it was not till ten o'clock at night that I was able to resume the recital of my breviary, in order to finish it before I went to bed.

"Suddenly I heard the bell ring violently. I went downstairs to answer the door myself, and found our servant in front of an old lady, who begged in imploring tones that a

priest would go round to a certain house, giving the number and name of the street, to help a young man at the point of death. I asked if the visit could be deferred till the following day, but she entreated me, laying a marked stress on the words, not to delay for an instant. I then wrote down on a slate which hung in the hall of the presbytery the sick person's name and address, exactly as it had just been given to me, and I got ready everything necessary for the administration of the last Sacraments to take with me.

"I was, I must own, tired and harassed after a long and fatiguing day, and I gently reproached my visitor for not coming sooner. I said this without any unkindness, but I saw that it seemed to give her great pain, and changing my tone, I said as warmly as possible: '*You may depend on me, I will be with you in less than twenty minutes.*'

"She answered in a low voice, but with deep emotion: '*May God reward you for your charity, and may He be with you at the hour of your death.*'

"Just as she was leaving, I asked her, in order to make quite sure, to tell me again the sick person's name and address, and casting my eye on the slate, I saw that I had written them down correctly. I then renewed my promise to rejoin her as

soon as possible, and bidding her goodbye, I looked at her fixedly to see if I had already noticed her in church. Her face and voice were quite unknown to me, and I had heard for the first time the name which she told me was that of the sick person. In less than ten minutes I was ready and on my way.

"It was a typical November night; the fog was thick and the streets deserted. I passed through several, and at last I found myself in a square leading out of which was the street I was bound for. With some difficulty I found the number of the house and rang the bell.

"An old woman opened the door.

"'*There is somebody very ill here?*' I said to her.

"'*No, sir,*' she answered, '*not here. This is number —*'

"And she told me the same number as that which was written on the slate.

"'*Exactly,*' I said. '*I was sent here by a lady who came to fetch me to-night. I am the Catholic priest of the chapel at ——, and I have come to see a sick person in danger of death.*'

"'*We have no sick person here, sir. They certainly made a mistake when they gave you this address.*'

"I was about to depart, feeling decidedly puzzled, when a young man, who had over-

heard the dialogue, came out of one of the rooms, and with much cordiality expressed his regret at my having been forced to come out so late, and in such bad weather.

"'*If you like to come in here, Father,*' he added, '*you will find a good fire.*'

"I followed him, and repeated to him what I had already told the servant, adding how vexed I was that I had been given the wrong address.

"Then, remembering that he had addressed me as Father (in England only Catholics say Father when speaking to a priest):

"'*Are there then no Catholics here?*' I asked him.

"'*No, not that I know of,*' he said; '*and yet,*' he added after a moment, '*I ought to be a Catholic, for I was baptized one.*'

"We then began to talk, and our conversation was long and serious. The young man was evidently honest and sincere; but he had given up the practice of his religion for the last ten years, although he still kept his faith at the bottom of his heart.

"God blessed my words, for before I left him I heard his confession and made an appointment for the next day.

"On the following day, which was Sunday in the octave of All Saints, I expected to see my penitent appear; but to my great

surprise he failed to do so, either at the presbytery or at the church.

"The day afterwards, Monday, his old servant, bathed in tears, came to tell me of her young master's sudden death. He had been found lifeless in his bed on the Sunday, struck by apoplexy of the heart. From what the doctor said, death must have ensued soon after my departure, for on Sunday morning the body was already stiff and cold.

"I have only one thing to add to this true and simple story. I betook myself to the house to pray beside the coffin which had been placed in one of the principal rooms. I was absorbed in prayer, when suddenly, raising my eyes, I saw hanging over the chimney-piece the portrait of the old lady who had come to fetch me 'for a young man at the point of death.' My servant, who accompanied me also, on seeing the portrait, recognized the person to whom she had spoken. But what were my feelings when I was told that this was the portrait of the young man's mother, *who had been dead for some years!*"

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